WHOOPS, DEARIE!

PETER ARNO

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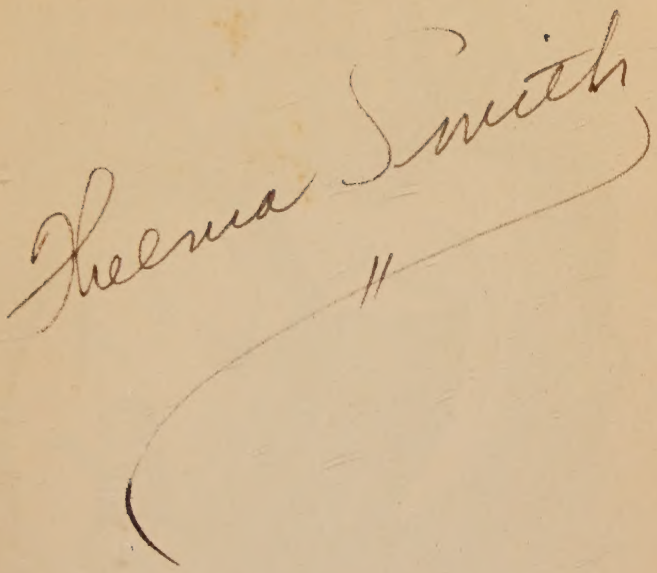

peter
Arno
SMELLING
SALTS

Whoops Dearie!

by PETER ARNO

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

TO

REA IRVIN

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank both Mr. P. G. Wylie and his trusty Remington portable for their help with this book.

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WHOOPS, DEARIE!

CHAPTER ONE

"PANSY!"

Silence.

"PANSY!"

Still—

"PANSY!"

A crazy quilt stirred and a muff fell to the floor. Marshall stirred and fell to the floor as softly as the muff. Marshall was the cat. Mrs. Flusser sat up and eyed him while he stretched in the morning sunlight and gave his face a lick and something more than a promise. Then she addressed the quilt again.

"Wake up, ye little mouse. Here it is eleven o'clock an' we'll be missin' breakfast again. Whoops! Wake up, d'ye hear me? Comin' with a pitcher o' water."

Pansy Smiff came up on one elbow with aggrieved dignity. "Pitcher o' water, will ye, ye bloomin' alarm clock! Ain't it fittin' I should have me beauty sleep after traipsin' around to all hours? An' comin' near dancin' with a handsome fireman?"

"Handsome? Lordy! Him? Whoops!"

"All right, ye green-eyed monster."

Pansy caught the cat and prodded it until it escaped via the commode and the kitchen chair on

which it slept. Noises crept up from the floors below, familiar, articulate noises which they identified as they went about their garrulous toilet.

The dwelling was a rather old house dedicated to the declining years of rather old people. Mrs. Roderick Payntor, upon whose fortune and person it was dependent, had decided to call it "Sunset Villa" with, perhaps, a certain lack of tact for its resident guests, who insisted on circumlocuting their patron's poetic fancy by referring to it familiarly as "the bird-cage." Unconsciously she may have liked the poignant sting of the name she had given it. Charity is occasionally like that. And three million dollars makes a difference in one's point of view.

"Sunset Villa" snuggled in the shadow and echo of the elevated railroad between a building filled with printers on one side and an edifice given over to the manufacture of tin cans on the other. The assaults of commerce on the old four-story mansion left it defaced but obdurate. Mrs. Payntor's corps of assistants had, of course, divided the expansive Victorian rooms into cells and "sanitized" them with linoleum, wall mottos and insecticide. A fire escape climbed up the façade like an ugly vine; the steps had been torn away to make room for Italian pedestrians; and small windows had been cut through the walls here and there with an astonishing effect on the architect's original design.

However, the inhabitants of the old house, among

"Whoops! Wake up d'ye hear me? Comin' with a pitcher o' water!"

whom were Mrs. Flusser and Pansy Smiff, managed to while away the superfluous years of their lives with a semblance of comfort. Homely intrigues; endless gossiping; the passing along of choice bits of scandal—these supplied the spice of life in this most proper retreat. Occasionally, excitement was furnished by the advent of a new guest—usually following the doleful departure of an old one.

Thus the arrival of a certain Mr. Walpole Fipple was heralded to the pair of ladies about town in a somewhat unusual manner as they completed the business of clothing themselves. At the precise moment of his picturesque self-announcement Pansy was arranging her hug-me-tight under a barrage from Mrs. Flusser: "A hug-me-tight on a warm day like this, dearie? You'll have yourself in a lather in no time."

"Lather or no lather, I'm wearin' it. Wearin' it buttoned, too, sweetheart. There's a considerable hiatus between me skirt an' me shirtwaist."

"Hi-atus? Whoops! Is that a word fer a lady t' use?"

"Lordy! If y' were half as innocent as yuh make out, y' wouldn't know the meanin' of the word!"

Mrs. Flusser lifted up the battered clock and inspected it. Its condition was such that it would run only face down. "Lackin' a few minutes of twelve. It's the Coffee Pot for us or wait till lunch. Which'll it be?"

But before Pansy could answer, a welter of harmonious music poured through the sleazy partition from the adjacent room.

"Gor!"

"Sounds like the angel Gabriel!"

"Must be the man in Cordelia's room."

A voice took up the melody, quavering but spirited. They caught snatches of the song:

"Madly jealous she
Vowed then to leave me. . . ."

They listened, transfixed:

"Husband and wifie, meeting face to face,
Soon all was forgotten in one wild embrace."

The singer's voice held the last notes of "The Passing Policeman" for several beats, ran a scale, dropped into the pathos of a minor and returned to a somewhat breathless tonic. Then he gave a final flourish on his zither. Silence.

Mrs. Flusser sighed. "The power o' real music. He must be one o' them genuses."

Pansy throbbed. "There's a tear in me eye. Lend me your lace handkerchief."

"Lace handkerchief! Whoops! Use yer petticoat like y' always do! Let's be applaudin' him."

They clapped their hands and rapped on the wall. The musician resumed. He talked in a dismal tone while he alternated two chords. It was the first time

"Whoops! Ain't they elegant?"

his audience had heard the Ballad of Reading Gaol. When he had finished they were speechless. Pansy went to the window and looked out. The zither zummed again and the barrenness of her life choked up in her.

"Lordy, Oh Lordy," she moaned.

Then she gave a little screech.

Mrs. Flusser snatched her ear from the wall. "What bit ye?"

"Come here, ye blinkin' heart-breaker. But remember I seen it first."

"If it's a new janitor or the likes, I seen him around here yesterday."

"Janitor! More like a gentleman of fashion, I says. Look."

Mrs. Flusser looked. "Whoops! Ain't they elegant!"

From a window-sill across the areaway, one story higher than their room, hung a pair of brilliant green socks criss-crossed with red stripes. With its back to the back of "Sunset Villa" stood one of those sulky hotel apartments into which all manner of people vanish and from which no one seems ever to emerge. For two years Mrs. Flusser and Pansy had watched with all-seeing eyes the indications of life in the building upon which their two windows gave. They knew about the man who bathed in his wash bowl and they had a theory about occasional raucous screeches that came from the apart-

ment where the shutters were nailed together. Now it appeared that a new tenant was going to enliven a scene set amid tar and gravel roofs, elevator cupolas, ventilators, air shafts, dirty windows and clothes-lines.

Mrs. Flusser reminisced. "Mr. Helk, as was me third husband, had green socks. But they wasn't so distinguished-lookin'."

"High class. Mebbe he's a French count travellin' under a nomdeploom."

"Them socks would give him away, ye little half-pint. He's a promoter."

"Or a ladies' barber."

"Or a bank watchman."

"Like as not, he's a stockin' salesman. Whoops!"

Mrs. Flusser frowned. "There ye go insinulatin'. It's only a step from knowin' a stockin' salesman to a life o' shame."

"I'll be leadin' a life o' shame with them temptations hanging before me eyes. Fer me, red stripes is like wavin' a red rag to a bull in a china shop, dearie. I have me moments o' weakness."

"Weakness, ye little divil! If it was his B. V. D.s danglin' out there like a fish worm ye'd drop dead."

"B. V. D.s! Married or not married ye'd ought to know better. A gentleman the likes o' him 'ud stop at nothin' short o' red flannels."

Mrs. Flusser collapsed in a spasm of laughter.

"Red flannels in summer! Oh, me holy mither! Ye poor innocent virgin!"

There was a knock at the door. Mr. Walpole Fipple had arrived at "Sunset Villa," after the convenient demise of the lady known as Cordelia, with his possessions in a carpet bag and two soap boxes. He breakfasted, and then, a little dubious of its reception, he retired to his chamber and made music on his cherished zither. He was delighted when the strident dialogue in the adjoining room had turned to instant attention. His heart warmed to the applause. And then, suddenly, in the middle of his second encore, the dialogue was resumed with more than its previous vehemence.

He realized that some sort of counter attraction had deprived him of an audience. "Women are so damned unappreciative," he mumbled. Then he played in a louder key—with no effect. Finally he had an inspiration. He stood before the cracked and streaked mirror, bulged out his tie, snapped vigorously at an imaginary speck of lint on his lapel, and arranged his zither in the carrying position. He had to put it down to rearrange the seventeen or eighteen white hairs which constituted his forelock but at last he was ready. He knocked next door and was greeted by Mrs. Flusser. His immediate reaction was an intense desire to hurl himself and even his zither downstairs. But she had listened to his music.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I'm new at the 'Villa' and I wanted to inquire at what hour luncheon is served." He had framed the query after five minutes of concentrated thinking, and he intoned it faintly.

Mrs. Flusser stared at him. "Pansy, come away from the window. Here's the harpin' gent with his music box."

"Ain't we honored, though!"

Mr. Fipple bowed.

"I'm Mrs. Flusser. This is Pansy Smiff."

"I am Walpole Fipple. I have been, till recently, interested in the shipping business. I hadn't missed a sailing in years, and then one night—but more of that anon. You see, the zither has been merely a hobby with me—I may say a life-long hobby."

"Land o' Goshen!" Mrs. Flusser was impressed. "It ain't visitin' day, but come in. Have a pretzel."

Mr. Fipple sat down and spread the zither on his knees anxiously.

"Strike her up. That there one about 'husband and wifie'——"

"Ah," he breathed, " 'The Passing Policeman.' A favorite of mine."

He performed. Bye and bye Pansy's eyes strayed toward the window. Perhaps he had taken the socks in. She couldn't see. She fidgeted. Mr. Fipple was singing "Meeting face to face."

"Things happen' like a movin' picture," she in-

terrupted. "We didn't tell Mr. Fipple about the socks."

He tried to persevere feebly. But they conducted him to the window. He looked at the socks.

"Ugh!" he said. "How vulgar."

Mrs. Flusser bristled. "Vulgar me eye!" She turned on him and a new situation demanded her attention.

"Marshall! What'll ye be doin' next? Get down off the gentleman's banjo, d'ye hear!"

CHAPTER TWO

MRS. RODERICK PAYNTOR had theories relative to the duties of the patron of a home for old people. Among them was the notion that on every Friday afternoon she should call at "Sunset Villa" and pay a brief visit to her beneficiaries. The great day was usually ushered in appropriately by an explosive burst from Mrs. Flusser. "Friday, by the Lord Harry, an' we're gonna have that fish again! Whoops, I hope she strains 'er neck!" Two Fridays had passed, however, and the gracious lady had not made her pilgrimage. The matron of "Sunset Villa" telephoned anxiously on the third Friday. Mrs. Payntor was well, but she had recently conceived the brilliant notion of discarding her regular day and paying her visit when the mood suited her. Thus she would fling herself from the heaven of Park Avenue upon her protegés when they were in a natural and unprepared state.

The news hung over their heads like the sword of Damocles. With her unpredictable inspection always imminent, many changes were instituted at once. Mr. Vaney, who was called "the deacon" behind his back, no longer came to meals in his shirt sleeves.

Mrs. Payntor

Augusta, the oldest matriculant, gave up her habit of carrying her meals upstairs to eat in solitude. Daniel foreswore his reeking corncob in the "settin' room." And Mrs. Flusser and Pansy began to worry about Marshall.

One thing led to another. On Saturday, the day after Mr. Fipple's appearance, they arose almost in unison. Pansy, being nearer the window, reported.

"Whoops! They're yellow an' brown to-day, sweetheart."

"Glory be! Ain't they, though! He must be rich."

They stared long and lovingly at the socks of the unknown Don Juan.

"Changes 'em every day."

"An' washes 'em."

"Then he ain't rich. Why don't he send 'em to a wet-wash?"

"Ye little ignoramus! They're too valuable."

Her qualms allayed, Pansy's mind took another tangent. She leaned farther from the window. There was a board on the roof below. She saw that it could be pushed up to their sill and made a means of egress for Marshall in case of emergency. With great care she reached out of the window, embraced a telegraph pole which stood close to the wall and stepped down on the flat roof. Mrs. Flusser, once she understood the plan, prepared to affix the upper end of Marshall's ladder of escape.

About an hour and a half before, on Park Avenue, there had been a small riot which was confined to a single apartment, fortunately, and which involved a lone combatant against a quartet of neutral but nimble maids. Mrs. Roderick Payntor's whole day had been ruined by the arrival of a new evening gown. She had put it on and decided that it made her look fleshy. Scarcely had her day been ruined when her nerves were shattered. News arrived that her only son, who was away at a summer camp, had fallen from a cliff and badly sprained his little finger. "The day before his twenty-fifth birthday, too," she sobbed.

With her day ruined, and her nerves shattered, it required little enough to bring on a spell. And Anna, the downstairs maid, broke one of the china gold fish. With eyes already red-rimmed, Mrs. Payntor witnessed the disaster. The butler passed with a card tray in his hand. She seized it and flung it at Anna. It broke a mirror. Then she threw a chair and seven pillows and a vase. The servants assembled and stood respectfully, if warily, until she subsided into a Louis Quinze chaise longue, gurgling hysterically.

For several minutes she was inconsolable. Her mouth tightened, finally, and she said to the butler, "Tell Marcus to bring the Rolls."

The Rolls started for "Sunset Villa" and punctured a tire in the neighborhood of the Waldorf.

"Tell Marcus to bring the Rolls!"

Mrs. Payntor was forced ignominiously to walk a block and a half and sit in the lobby while Marcus put on another wheel. So she arrived at the home ready at the sight of a speck of dust to lay hands on the first vase that crossed her path. Mrs. Palmy, the matron, greeted her effusively.

"You haven't been here for so long. We've all missed you."

"You have, eh?"

Mrs. Palmy gave a wan defensive smile. She was holding a pan filled with apple sauce behind her back. When Mrs. Payntor rang the door bell she had been on her way to her room with it.

"Hmmm. Everybody well?"

"Oh, yes. That is, except for the usual things. I've had to call a doctor for Mr. Vaney. He——"

"You what?"

"Called a doctor for Mr. Vaney. He had an attack."

"Ridiculous!"

"Well you see, it was acute indigestion."

"Indigestion!" Mrs. Payntor screeched. "In my establishment? Just what have you been feeding them? Have the menus sent to my house at once. I wish to go over them. Indigestion! What's that you have there?"

"That" was the saucepan. Mrs. Palmy became confused. "Oh—ah—applesauce."

Mrs. Payntor looked at her suspiciously. Mrs. Payntor read comic strips. "I beg your pardon?"

"Applesauce, I said."

"Is it necessary for you to be insulting?"

"I'm sorry, I don't mean to be insulting."

"Are you sure it isn't banana oil?"

"Banana oil?"

"I said banana oil, I believe."

"No—applesauce. Not a lot, just a little. You see I missed lunch because of Mr. Vaney and I thought——"

"That will do, Mrs. Palmy. I am beginning to believe you are quite incompetent for the matronship. The condition of this place is inconceivable! Apple sauce! Have you no discretion? Indigestion! No wonder. I shall ask you to pay the bill for this Mr. Slaney, or whatever his name is."

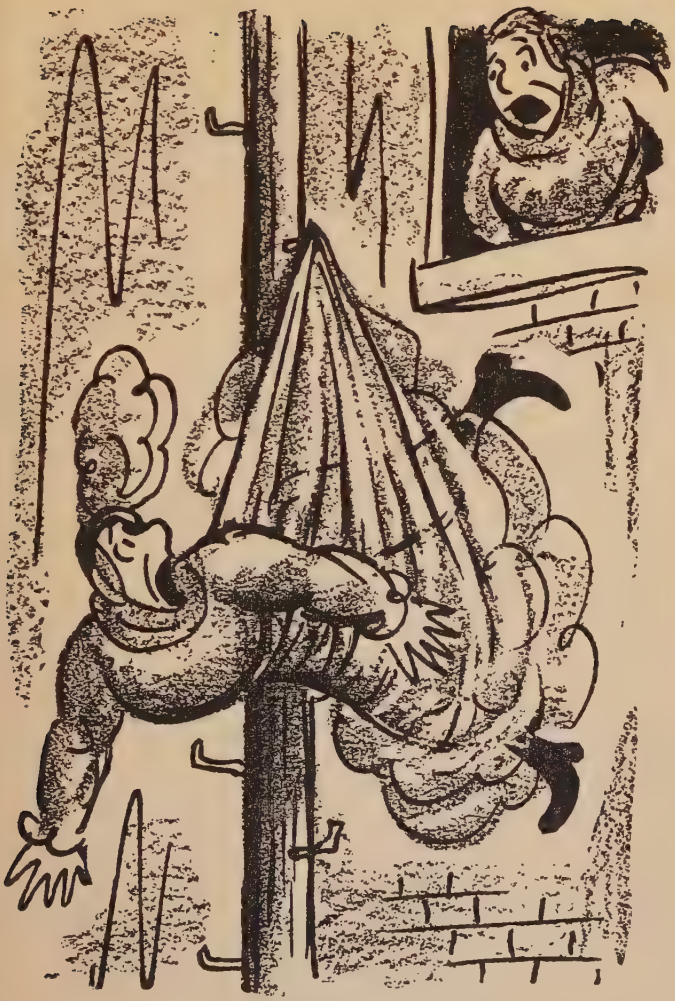
"But madam, acute indigestion is——"

"Inexcusable. Merciful heavens!"

From the floor above came a booming shout. "Help! Pansy's hangin' by her bustle! Whoops! Help!"

Mrs. Payntor ran up the stairs like a charging rhinoceros and Mrs. Palmy followed with dread in her heart.

Mrs. Flusser and Pansy had succeeded in making an avenue of escape for the cat in case of the unannounced arrival of Mrs. Payntor. But when Pansy endeavored to climb back she found it neces-



"Throw me a sheet! Whoops!"

sary to ask the aid of her partner, who let go, unfortunately, at the crucial moment. Pansy would have dropped several stories to the ground, but the nether folds of her dress caught on a spike of the telegraph pole and suspended her in the air. She could go neither up nor down, but hung, like a beetle on a string, kicking and screaming.

Mrs. Flusser was beside herself when Mrs. Payntor bolted into the chamber.

"Fer the lova Gawd get the fire department! Get the police! Pansy's hung herself! Whoops! I'm havin' hysterics! Say, ye purple faced dandelion, get a wiggle on. I'm past recoverin' 'er!"

Mrs. Payntor said "Jesus!" and looked out the window. She repeated the oath. Pansy glared up at her in fear, rage and pain.

"I'm dyin', ye blatherin' sufferagatte! Come without warnin' us, will ye? Lordy, can't a pretty girl look at a pair o' socks? Throw me a sheet! Whoops!"

The lady from Park Avenue appeared to be on the point of explosion. With an effort that nearly caused her apoplexy she said, "Mrs. Palmy! Take her down at once."

"Y—yes, ma'am."

"Immediately. I shall attend to you and these—creatures in the drawing room."

"Creatures! Whoops!" Mrs. Flusser fainted.

Mrs. Palmy fainted.

Mrs. Payntor went downstairs and tried to faint.

Pansy, left to her own devices, found that her foot would reach a spike. She disengaged her dress and made her way to the ground—and fainted too.

Half an hour later Mrs. Payntor left "Sunset Villa," and Mrs. Palmy left on the following day. Her place was taken by a Mrs. Ritchie who had a tremendous mole on her left cheek. Otherwise she might have been a handsome woman. Her disposition was the product of those two facts. She was a good natured and benign creature—when Mrs. Payntor was making one of her growingly infrequent visits—but the remainder of her life was devoted to taking the kindness out of charity.

As for Mrs. Payntor, her presence on the occasion of Pansy's singular suspense gave a new twist to her philanthropy. She kept away from the home and filled her life and the lives of as many friends as possible with tales of the hardships she endured in behalf of her beloved poor. It was far more satisfactory for everyone concerned. For Pansy and Mrs. Flusser she devised various punishments. They washed dishes one week, grumbling—if the word may be used for highly audible anathema, and the next they received a message to the effect that they would scrub floors.

Mrs. Ritchie carried the news to Mrs. Flusser.

"Scrub floors! By me grandmother's corsets, we'll

scrub ye floors so they'll shine fit to put ye eye out! Scrub? Whoops! We'll stabilize 'em of germs."

Mrs. Flusser had an idea. She and Pansy scrubbed the floor in the front bedroom with a hundred and twenty-eight pails of water. Even Mrs. Ritchie was startled at the result. She never asked them to scrub another floor. Ceilings were too expensive.

"We was only gettin' it clean," they explained indignantly and marched out of "Sunset Villa."

The local on the Seventh Avenue subway stopped at West Houston Street. There were several seats in the last car when two elderly women entered. Passengers lolled half asleep, read tabloid newspapers, tried to conceal the fact that they were giving baby his bottle behind a dirty copy of the *Morning World,* looked at the limbs of the young lady across the aisle, and read the car cards.

"Whoops!" said Mrs. Flusser, "let's walk to the front an' see where we're goin'."

"Sure, sweetheart. Maybe there'll be a wreck an' we'll see it first."

They started. A gentleman rubbed his corn where a heel had come down. A carelessly swung muff deprived another citizen of his newspaper.

"Beggin' your pardon. Whoops! Did ye see him, dearie? Another inch an' I'd o' clipped off his horn-rims."

Another customer of the I. R. T. felt an elbow in his ribs and found himself sitting on the lap of an Ethiopian.

"Dropped him, by the Lord Harry! Whoops! Get the one with the nanny-goat whiskers. Me elbow ain't long enough."

"Two cars more, dearie. Is anyone followin' us?"

"Nope."

"Mind the conductor!"

Bang! The guard grabbed the chains and saved himself from death between the lurching platforms. "Hey, what th' hell!" he yelled.

"Whoops! Look out, you'll be walkin' off the front."

At Times Square they plunged into the crowd with resolution and good will. . . .

Mr. Algonquin Navajo Porter proceeded along Broadway with peace in his heart. He stared at the Paramount building, and it was good to see. Sun fell upon it slantingly. High up where the iron work was still in the process of tumultuous completion tiny figures straddled beams that hung over space. He wondered whether the figures would splash or go through the pavement if they fell. He wondered how long it would take one to fall. He wondered if one could jump in a parachute from such a height and land safely. Suppose the jumper came down on a taxi-cab. Maybe he could go for miles without

Mr. Porter and Gertrude crossed Forty-second Street unobtrusively.

paying a fare. Probably in a direction he didn't want to go.

He passed a policeman, who saluted him. That was Mike. He always saluted. Mr. Porter wondered how many times he would have to salute to wear out his cap. Maybe a million. Could he do it in a lifetime? A hundred times a day, ten thousand days, how many years?

"Bother," he said. Mike was fat. All policemen were fat. Probably from standing around all day. No. Floor-walkers were thin and they stood around all day. He tripped on the trolley track.

"Bother," he repeated.

Behind him, Gertrude, his elephant, walked with ponderous composure.

Mr. Porter and Gertrude crossed Forty-second Street unobtrusively, each ruminating about various things as they passed, each utterly content. They continued north. Far astern they might have heard two voices, had it not been for the din of the traffic which they disdainfully ignored.

"Whoops! There's a man with an elephant!"

"Ain't he grand? Let's catch up."

The door man at the Astor saluted Gertrude and Algonquin whereon they entered and went into the lobby to sit down.

"We might as well look at the people here for a while and get a little rest like everybody else," Mr. Porter observed.

Gertrude nodded.

Presently there were sounds of altercation at the down town entrance of the Astor.

Gertrude turned her head slowly and her eyes brightened. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy had entered. Mr. Porter smiled weakly.

"There they are!" Pansy shouted.

When they came abreast of the elephant, she held up her foreleg. Mrs. Flusser pressed it warmly. "Ain't she the enchantin' monster! Whoops! Pleased to meet ye. This is me sister, Pansy Smiff."

Gertrude bowed and Mr. Porter appeared from behind and beyond.

"An' 'ere's the gent who owns the little lamb! Me name's Flusser, as was Gorky."

A keen-eyed clerk walked up briskly. Algonquin Navajo Porter kicked at the carpet miserably.

"No elephants allowed here," the clerk said curtly.

Mrs. Flusser turned on him. "Elephants? Whoops! D'yuh call her an elephant—a sweet little darlin' like that? Breeze away, what-not, breeze away!"

The what-not breezed.

"D'yuh call her an elephant—a sweet little darlin' like that?"

CHAPTER THREE

"NOTHIN' BUT the finest," said Mrs. Flusser, and the clerk at Saks brought out their Pick of Picnic Plates.

"Them's the best?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'll take four."

"Anything else?"

"Anything else, she says! D'ye think we're eatin' plates? Whoops! Mebbe we are! Give us four napkins, too, in case of a accident."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ye got any pickles?"

"No, ma'm."

"Sardines?"

"No."

"Ancho—Anko— Tell the lady, Pansy."

"Ancho—vees."

"No. This is a department store."

"Department store, y' call it? Whoops! Have y'ever seen Macy's?"

It required considerable shopping to prepare for the picnic. But at last they set out for Central Park, laden with bundles. Mr. Porter and Gertrude were

waiting for them at the Plaza end of the Mall. The elephant eyed the packages speculatively and sighed. Mr. Porter spoke encouragingly. "There'll be trees, Gertrude, when the police aren't looking. Sometimes I wish you were a goat and could eat paper. Oh, well, maybe you'll learn."

Gertrude nodded. "You see," Mr. Porter went on, "she's been trying. I've been giving her the *Times* every morning for breakfast."

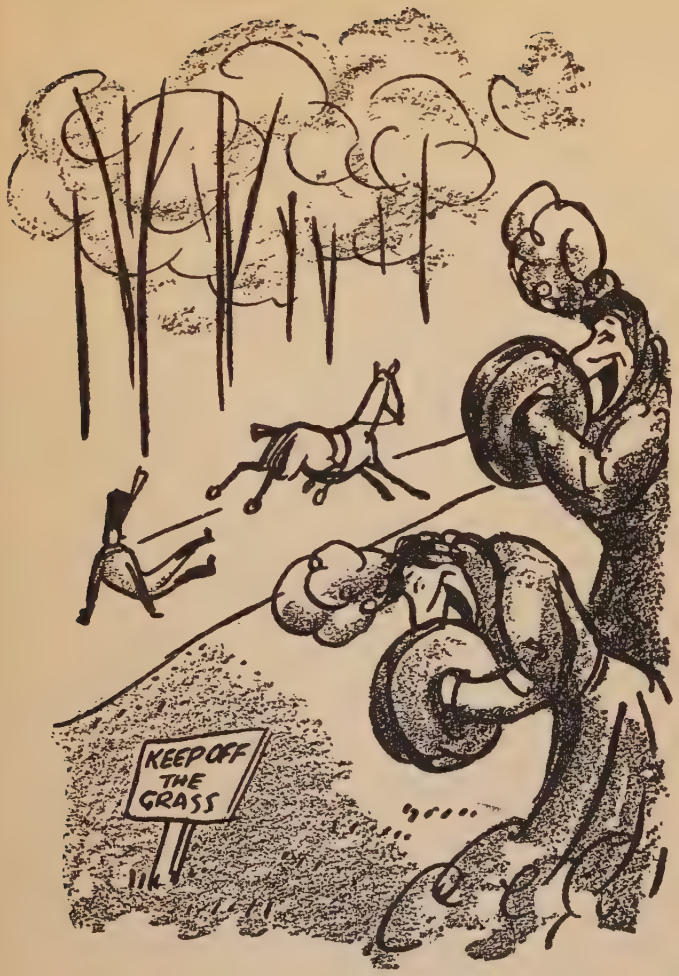
"Times!" Mrs. Flusser said, "No wonder she doesn't like it. Give her the *News,* an' if she can't stand it straight, give her the *News* and the *Times,* half-and-half."

The elephant's gait quickened. "I'll try," Mr. Porter said. "Funny papers give her indigestion, and the *World* tintogravures are too rich.

They found a secluded glade, cleared away the debris and sat down. Limousines and taxicabs purred and snorted over the warm asphalt. The plates were laid. A member of Squadron A passed on the bridle path, fell off his horse, and chased it, panting, toward the reservoir.

Pansy drew attention to the calamity gleefully.

Mrs. Flusser frowned. "You be keepin' your eye off them bridal paths, sweetheart. It's me who knows as is tellin' ye. Whoops! It's a long lane as has no turnin' but a bridal path is crookeder'n a sow's purse."



A member of Squadron A fell off his horse.

"Dill or sweet, Mr. Porter?" Pansy asked.

"Dill."

"Here's a pretty kettle o' fish!" Mrs. Flusser roared.

"What?"

"We've gone an' come on a picnic without potato salad!"

"Gor!" said Pansy.

"Bother," said Mr. Porter.

Mrs. Flusser peered over the verdant landscape as if she expected to see a bowl of salad materialize. There was nothing but a drinking fountain and a boy on two bicycles to reward her search.

"Nice mess!"

"Say, sweetheart, let's leave Gertrude and the gentleman in the sunshine and get some salad at the nearest restaurant."

"An expiration! Let's be goin'."

A very smart canopy stretched over Park Avenue and bore the numerals 300. Sherry's. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy passed underneath it in their search for a restaurant.

"Swell, ain't it?"

"Wonder if it's a apartment?"

"Mebbe Mr. Dudley Malone lives there. He's a grand gentleman."

They would not have recognized it as a dining place if a limousine had not drawn up and debouched a party of four elegantly dressed matrons

who mentioned luncheon as they traversed the sidewalk.

"D'ja hear that? A eatin' place. Let's go in."

A short, but rather formidable individual stood at the entrance to the dining-room. When Mrs. Flusser and Pansy entered, his right eyebrow went an eighth of an inch higher thereby jeopardizing his hair line, and his moustache twitched. Either sign would have sent a slightly tipsy débutante packing or an overland magnate into whispers.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

"Mistake! That's a good 'un. How in the name of your grandmother's bustle can there be a mistake when we ain't done nothin' yet?"

"But, madam, this is a private dining room."

"Private, is it? Well, me husband as was third was a corporal, I'll have ye know."

"What can I do for you?" The gentleman's eyes sought vainly for assistance.

"We're customers. We're buyin' a pound o' your best potato salad."

To Pansy it sounded meagre for such surroundings so she added, "An' a bunch o' bananas."

"Impossible! This is not a—ah—delicatessen."

"Impossible, is it? Come on, Pansy, we'll find the chef." Mrs. Flusser eyed the gentleman in the immaculate cut-away. "He'll tell ye where yuh get off, little one! Delicatessen! Whoops, I'll bet it ain't even tabble dotey!"

"Whoops! Olives! Hold yer skirt!"

Perspiration poured from the glass of fashion. Several of the guests peered through the curtain. "Wait a moment," he said.

He disappeared. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy entered the dining room. They went to a service table.

"Whoops! Olives! Hold your skirt!"

Waiters crowded about them like members of a football team surrounding a fellow whose nether garments are in distress. The knot moved toward the door. Protesting voices arose. The guests smiled. One arose and departed.

A very sodden and purple-faced gentleman met the foray in the vestibule. In his arms was a package, neatly wrapped and bearing the label "Louis Sherry." He surrendered it weakly. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy went out whooping. The picnic was resumed.

Later in the afternoon they strolled in the vicinity of the Lake. Near them a small boy gazed over the water thoughtfully. Presently he fell in. For several minutes he allowed the warmish liquid to gurgle about his heavy garments. Then he heard the approach of footsteps. He kicked and threw up his hands.

"Help," he screamed.

Mrs. Flusser heard him. She cleared a park bench in a leap. Twenty-three leaps later she held his dripping form close to her.

"The poor darlin'. Are ye drowned?"

The small boy was weeping. "I—I—I think so."

They took him back to the camp site. His crying stopped when he saw Gertrude. An explanation of his predicament was demanded. He lived in an "orphalage" down town. He had been taken to the Park to see the animals and the others had left him. He did not see fit to explain that they had left him by the Mohammed method.

"What's yer name, darlin'," asked Pansy.

"Fester."

"Whoops! What a name!"

"Maybe he means Hester," Mrs. Flusser suggested.

"Lordy, ye're ravin' mad. That's a name y' give dumb pets. More like Lester, prob'ly."

While the discussion was going on, Fester had wandered over to inspect a large waste-receptacle that had caught his eye.

"Well, maybe the name *is* Fester, after all. Ain't he th' little darlin', though?"

"Yeh, so gentle, so nice an' refined, so—Fester! Get outa that ash-can this minute, an' take whatever ye're chewin' outa yer mouth! Come back here, d'ya hear!"

Fester came, and despite this discouraging incident, Mrs. Flusser and Pansy were elated over their find, though they were a trifle uncertain as to what to do with him. As soon as he had dried out, however, Fester took the situation more or less in his own

"What's yer name, darlin'?"

hands. He wanted to see the monkeys. They saw them. And the lions. And the goats. And other things. The sun set over the Cosmopolitan Theatre and somebody turned on the Fisk Tire sign. Thanks to Louis Sherry, there was enough left over from lunch for supper. They decided unanimously to remain.

After supper Fester vanished. His absence was not noticed for some time.

Half fearfully he made his way along the intricate paths of the Park. He passed couples on benches with a sophisticated disgust. For a while he pretended that he was a pirate looking for buried treasure. Then he imagined that he was a policeman on the gas house beat. At length the bright lights of the Casino attracted his attention. He conceived it to be an enemy camp and approached warily. A youth stepped down from the porch, lit a cigarette and tossed the match to the ground where it lay still burning. Fester salvaged it before it went out. A piece of newspaper increased the life cycle of the flame.

Inside the Casino the orchestra was playing. Alice Weatherstone looked profoundly into the eyes of James Stockton.

"I know I'm beautiful," she said. "But somehow I long for something else—something that transcends mere beauty."

"You have a soul," he answered.

"Sometimes I wonder. I have doubts. Do I, I say to myself, do I really have a soul? Then I feel doubtful of myself. In fact, I become very miserable, you see, because I don't know, I don't know."

He ladeled his soup. "When I look in your eyes I know you have a soul."

"You're poetic, aren't you, James."

"Every man is a poet at heart."

"I wonder——"

The aesthetic bond salesman sniffed. "Say! I smell smoke."

"Always back to the material, James."

"But I do?"

"Nonsense! It's the steak."

"Don't you?"

Miss Weatherstone became very pale. "Fire!" she said. "James! Save me."

Jimmie sat quietly. "I think something is on fire."

Her color returned double strength. "Of course it is! Why don't you do something? Aesthete! Isn't there a practical streak in you anywhere?" Her eyes snapped. "I suppose you would leave me here to burn!"

"Damn!" Jimmie answered. "Waiter!"

"Yes sir."

"I smell smoke. I rather think a fire has started somewhere."

"I'll investigate."

"You cool beast!" Alice said. "Take me out! Do

"Do I, I say to myself, do I really have a soul?"

something! Tear up the table-cloth and make a rope!"

"Really, Alice. It's only four feet to the ground."

"I don't care. Do something!"

"I shall. Waiter! My soup is cold. I believe the building is on fire. So I see no excuse for serving chilly soup."

"You're impossible!" Alice stood up. Her eyes dilated and she pointed. Through a minute crevice in the floor a wraith of smoke entered the dining room. "See! We're too late already!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Flusser, Pansy, Gertrude and Algonquin had searched far and wide for Fester. At last they found him. He stood back a little from a blaze that was making headway at the corner of the Casino.

"Whoops!" Mrs. Flusser shouted. "He's burnin' down the hotel! Turn in an alarm! Come here, ye little Mrs. Murphy!"

Several guests came out and saw the fire. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy took Fester between them and dashed from the scene. The boy flew out behind them like a kite. Mr. Porter was left in charge. He whispered in Gertrude's ear and she lumbered toward the lake. Shortly afterward she returned and put out the conflagration with a single trunk-full of water. She and Mr. Porter melted into the shadows. The fire was over before it had attracted particular attention.

On the subway Mrs. Flusser cuffed Fester roundly. "First it's water an' then it's fire. You'll be diggin' yerself a grave next!"

Pansy looked at the dejected lad with interest. At West Houston Street the train stopped. "Let's give him a bath," she said. "Whoops!"

—and dashed from the scene.

CHAPTER FOUR

LATER IN the evening Fester was returned to the orphanage. His exterior was intact, but somewhere within him a not altogether unmalicious soul writhed in vengeful plans that had for their object Mrs. Flusser and Pansy Smiff, spinster. He was given an official spanking and sent to bed with an eternity of no desserts stretching ahead of him. He cogitated the problem from every angle. Undoubtedly murder was too quick and painless for Mrs. Flusser. And Pansy deserved nothing short of a wire mask or a water cure.

While he conspired he fell asleep. Morning found him, however, unrequited and still avid for the skins of the ladies in question. Before starting to school he crept through the house and began to arm himself. The kitchen afforded mustard and pepper in two small tins. Then he went to the cellar where he decided that the axe was unpractical, but he compromised on a pair of wire-cutters and a handful of rusty nails. Added to those aggressive impedimenta were his customary side-arms: one slingshot, a bag of marbles, a jack-knife, and a bean shooter which he carried in his stocking.

David went forth thereafter to meet his Goliaths.

In the meantime the routine at "Sunset Villa" had followed its customary trajectory. Mrs. Flusser had awakened Pansy and they had inspected the newest crop of gentleman's socks. The green ones which had originally involved their hearts were once more on display. That brought the total up to eleven pairs, if he were rotating. Otherwise there were still adventures ahead. Mrs. Ritchie, the matron, knocked to remind them that they were late to breakfast again. From the next room came an intonation, "Oh, the Northern Lights have seen queer sights, but the queerest they ever did see—was the night on the marge of Lake Le Barge when I cremated Sam Magee . . ." accompanied by two irrelevant chords which the zitherist felt would set the proper tone for his recitation.

Mrs. Flusser pounded on the wall, "Stop your caterwallin', will yuh? Or be playin' somethin' new. We've heard that there Magee till we've mesmerized it. Stop, d'yuh hear?"

The voice wavered and went on with emotion, "So I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal and I stuffed the body in. . . ." Plunk, pink, pink. Plunk, pink, pink.

"Stop! Y' Hooligan!"

Plunk, pink, pink.

It will be seen that music hath its charms only when it is variegated. In the eyes, or rather the ears of his neighbors, Mr. Fipple's gift became a

"Oh, the Northern Lights have seen queer sights—"

commonplace, a habit, a bore, a vice, a nuisance, and finally an insufferable pest. Still he played on.

The walls of the Flusser-Smiff chambers were made more attractive by a turkey's foot. It had been the locomotive appendage of a real gobbler, but some artisan had removed the ligaments so that the toes were rigid, gilded it, affixed a red ribbon at the knee joint, and made it useful by setting a match barrel over the instep. Sam Magee was still enjoying his incendiary demise when the ornament sailed through a transom and shattered the spectacles of the senile troubador.

"Great howling Gabriel!" he shouted.

From beyond the door the criminal left a clue: "Whoops!"

The music stopped.

On the roof outside where Pansy had hung over the valley of death there was a faint scuffling. The two ladies went down for breakfast and a head appeared over the sill. Fester. He entered the room and took the pepperbox out of a bulging pocket. Its contents were devoted to handkerchiefs, pillowcases, feather boas and in part to Pansy's powder box. The mustard he applied here and there with equal foresight and scientific knowledge. An orphanage has its advantages.

He sprinkled the nails about the floor and recalled the wire cutter. With it he must do something. A wire handle on one of the receptacles in the room

offered a subject and he cut it nearly through before he heard footsteps on the stairs. He vanished, crossed the roof, and hid himself behind a ventilator where he could watch without being seen.

To his great disappointment Pansy closed the window almost as soon as she came in. Then he thought of his side-arm. A sling-shot, a marble, careful aim and a faint twang followed by a loud crash. Pansy's head appeared and Fester brought the bean shooter to bear. His accuracy was astounding.

"Whoops! Abagail! There's shootin' in the area!"

Mrs. Flusser took the position Pansy had violently relinquished. Something stung her cheek. "The divil! It's one o' them invisible guns ye can't hear. Whoops! I've been paralyzed!"

The other pane of glass cracked and slid harmoniously into the narrow court below.

"Mebbe it's the green socks gettin' even for impertinence!"

"Him? Lordy, no. Wait a minute!" Mrs. Flusser rushed from the room and knocked at Mr. Fipple's door. No response. She came back breathlessly. "It's that banjo-playin' mollycoddle next door takin' his revenge 'cause I made 'im shut up, that's what it is! Whoops! I'll scuff me feet on his kidney-pads when he comes in! I'll use his best shirt for a mop! Whoops! Where is he?"

"Whoops! I've been paralyzed!"

Pansy was on her knees peering over the window-ledge. "Mebbe he's down below, sweetheart. I seen somethin' move behind the smokestack."

The receptacle with the nearly disjointed handle was full of water. Mrs. Flusser seized it and swung it up toward the sill in preparation to douse the assassin below. A not unanticipatable event took place. The handle broke and the water splashed freely over the person of Mrs. Flusser. Her feet fled from beneath her and she sat abruptly in the puddle to which she herself contributed. "Strike me green!" she shrieked.

Fester realized that he had been located. He thought rapidly and desperately. He cached all his paraphernalia of war.

"Gimme a towel!" Mrs. Flusser bellowed.

Pansy gave her a towel that spored yellow powder.

Presently the unfortunate victim of the mustard was dancing a hornpipe. Tears poured from her eyes. A handkerchief added pepper to the series of outrages. The scene assumed carnival proportions. Guests poured into the room and volunteered suggestions that were met with every sort of frenzy from the articulate to the physical. After some time she was reduced to moderate comfort and immoderate moans. The others left. They had something to talk about.

Fester heard the uproar with some awe and much

satisfaction. Then, to further his plan, he commenced a plaintive wailing.

Pansy went to the window.

"Gor! There's that poor darlin' little Fester on the roof. I wonder——"

"Take me down," he whined.

"D'ye imagine he could o'——"

"Take me down." Luck guided the young Guy Fawkes. "A man put me up here."

Pansy turned to the recumbent Mrs. Flusser. "D'ye hear that! The blinkin' banjo player has gone an' put our darlin' up on the roof. The nerve o' him. Tryin' t' get away with an alibi like that! Whoops! Climb up the pole, honey!"

Fester joined them, blubbering. "A man put me up there," he repeated.

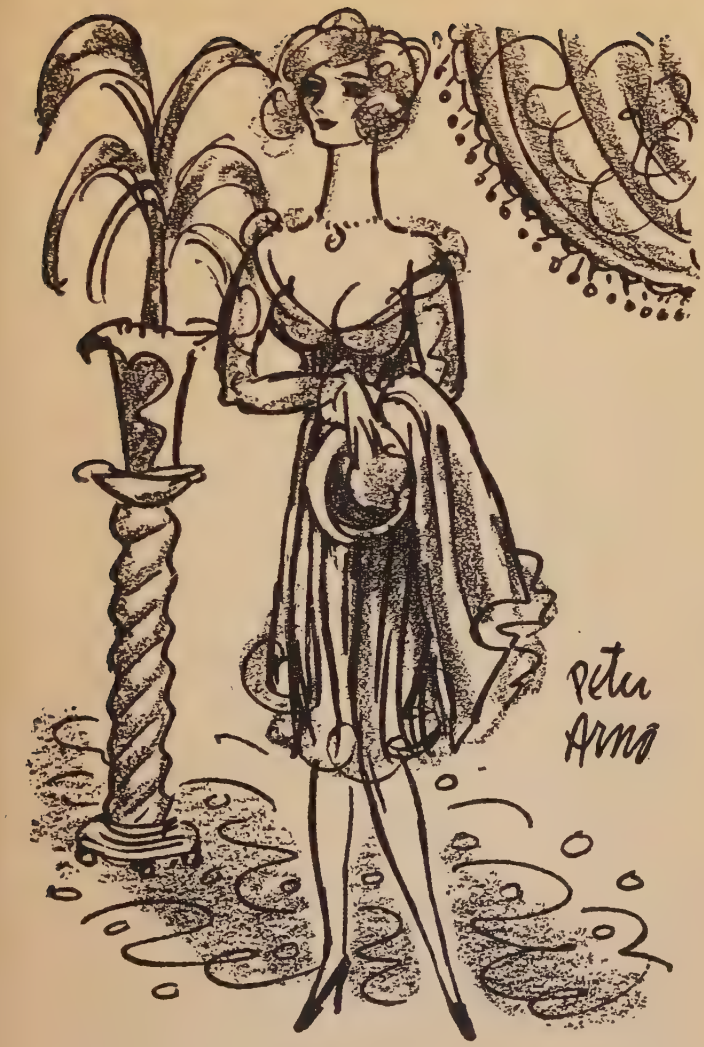
"A tall mean-lookin' old codger that might be a harper?"

"Y-y-y-y-yes," he sobbed, "an' I want some ice cream."

A week later Mr. Fipple and his zither applied for admission to another home. Mrs. Flusser and Pansy had worked quietly and effectively. And Fester had ice cream almost every afternoon.

The "Passing Policeman" had passed forever.

If any atonement was required of Fester by the immortal fates they reserved it for some future time. His life went blandly on. A few days after his sally, however, a temporary pang entered the bosoms of



Her hair was golden and her eyes were dark blue.

Mrs. Flusser and Pansy. A trained nurse had come to "Sunset Villa" to care for Mr. Vaney, who had fallen so ill that he could not be moved. She had been assigned quarters next to those of the widow and the virgin and they were sorely distressed with fear that she, too, might become prey to the siren socks.

Their anxiety was not lessened by her age, which was twenty-three, or her appearance, which was exceedingly attractive. Her name, they found, was Janet Weston. Her hair was golden and her eyes were dark blue. They made tentative thrusts at acquaintanceship in order to determine the mettle of their possible rival. But before many days had passed they decided to accept her. That she eventually elicited the strange life story of Mrs. Flusser is rather there than here. Janet never offended them. Eventually she became "that bonnie English colleen —Whoops!" which was fair enough, you'll admit.

Janet, when off duty, once accompanied the pair on a shopping tour which resulted in no purchases, but which put more than one nonchalant clerk to complete rout. Thereafter she found it necessary to do a little washing or wait for a doctor when Mrs. Flusser or Pansy announced that she was "rarin' to go an' lookin' for a side-kick."

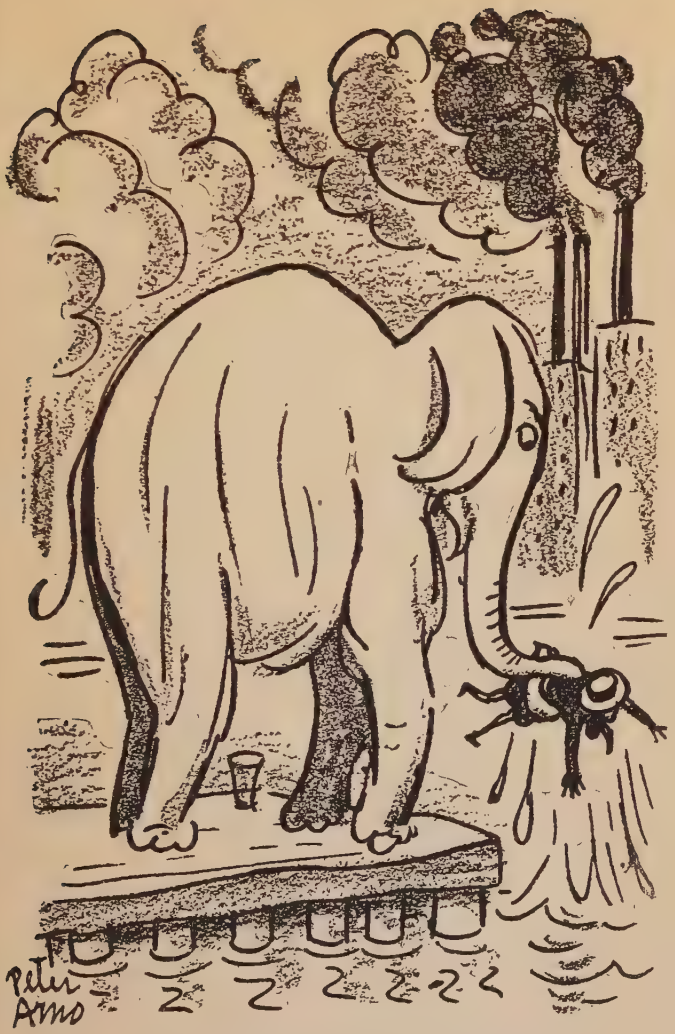
At first she took a cordial dislike to Fester and it was a long time before she discovered in him points fine enough to arouse her liberal maternal instinct.

She thought Mr. Algonquin Navajo Porter a surprising and amusing person; and a great bond sprang up between her and Gertrude the first time she saw that grande dame of all pachyderms.

Therefore she said nothing one afternoon when she witnessed a little drama under the windows of "Sunset Villa." Mr. Porter had temporarily deserted Gertrude, who was placidly watching the passing traffic. Fester suddenly appeared and offered her an apple, which she took with surprised enthusiasm. An instant later she spat it on the sidewalk, tossed a coil of trunk over Fester, whose laughter turned to dismay, and vanished under the corridor of steel pillars.

Mrs. Flusser and Pansy reappeared with Algonquin and looked up and down the avenue. A small cloud of dust far beyond distinguishable traffic failed to tell them of the elopement. They started a tour of the block. As for Gertrude, she continued steadfastly to Canal Street and followed it to the River where she ducked Fester thoroughly. It is bad enough to fall into the Hudson anywhere near Manhattan, but to suffer such an accident in the vicinity of Canal Street is not merely bad; it's perfectly horrible.

Then she brought Fester back, dripping heavily and very much disgusted. Several people stood at a reasonable distance looking on. When Algonquin saw Gertrude he shouted reprovingly.



—where she ducked Fester thoroughly.

Gertrude winked.

"Bother," Mr. Porter said, "now I'll have to punish her."

Mrs. Flusser came up. "Whoops! Punish an elephant? I'd like to see yuh do it! Mebbe ye paddle her rear with a barn door."

Mr. Porter walked around Gertrude as though he were measuring his task. A window in "Sunset Villa" opened. Janet Weston leaned out.

"Please don't whip Gertrude. She had legitimate cause for what she did."

"Did she now?" Mrs. Flusser asked. "Whoops! Fester! Where are ye?"

Fester had disappeared.

CHAPTER FIVE

EARLY ONE evening before the front pages of fifty million calendars more or less had been torn away and dropped into fifty million waste baskets, more or less, by yellow men in Thibet who represented sewing machine companies, and consequently installed the picture of the girl with the armful of wheat-stalks over their Jade Buddhas, and sub-white ladies of Broadway who liked nicely colored lithographs and learned the procession of the equinoxes from English remittance men who liked nicely colored ladies, and by the bobbed haired secretaries of financial magnates in the Wall street district—in other words, something less than a month later, a young man sat down in Washington Square.

This young man was tall and broad-shouldered; his visage would require a Harold Bell Wright for adequate description. In fact, he was not unlike the heroes of that redoubtable laundry of hand-washed ideals, save for the fact that he had a pernicious cigarette habit and that his morals needed attention.

His name was Allan. Allan Allen. And he was talking to himself in the recesses of his mind. His

unuttered conversation went, in part, "What a hell of a bright bird I turned out to be!" by which it may be assumed that he was not altogether satisfied with

himself. Which, indeed, was the fact. He came from a family so excellent that any short story writer would set him down immediately as a scion. His manners were impeccable, his clothing was immaculate. He had attended, pleasantly, several universities. However, at an early age he had walked over to the tribal piano and sounded a chord. That marked the beginning of his present situation. He had taken his music seriously, and would have been an infant prodigy if his mother had not been rather busy at the time studying batik-designing.

Instead, as has been hinted, he went the usual way of young men born in this age and ultimately he found himself behind a desk as assistant manager of one of his father's tin can factories. He re-

mained two days, went to his father, and said in substance, "Nix." His father drew himself up proudly and said in substance, "Very well, young man, if you scorn the occupation by which your worthy sire gains his livelihood, and if you persist in the remote notion that you are a musician, you may detach yourself from the Allens of Allentown, Allenburgh and Allenville and proceed merrily on your way. Merrily."

Allan Allen shrugged his shoulders and tied up his belongings in a nap—no, three wardrobe trunks —and came to New York. Gradually his savings of a lifetime, *i. e.*, his first week's salary as assistant manager, diminished to four dollars and eighty-seven cents, which is little enough in a city where you can spend ten dollars on a bottle of White Rock, or ginger ale, if you prefer it with your ten dollars.

As he sat on the park bench and jingled the eighty-seven cents, occasionally rustling the four dollars for variety, a girl, dressed like a nurse but not looking like one approached rather breathlessly. She stopped in front of him and spoke.

"Did you see two rather old ladies?"

"Once, when I was a little boy," Allan began.

"I mean, with muffs?"

"That does make a difference, doesn't it? Let me think——"

"Maybe you heard them?"

"Did you see two rather old ladies?"

"Are they invisible? Or do they carry megaphones?"

The nurse said, "Don't be funny," and then she said "Oh, dear," and Allan looked at her again and became solicitous.

"I'm sorry, but I didn't. If I can help you look for them——"

"I don't know what to do. Fester has climbed up the telegraph pole again and their room is locked. Mrs. Ritchie is out and I heard Marshall squeal. Oh, dear."

Allan was silent. "Did you say 'Fester?' "

"Yes. He's a boy."

"And he climbed up a telegraph pole, you said?"

"Yes."

"And the room is locked?"

"Yes. And I'm afraid he's got mustard again. I shouldn't have left. He won't open the door."

"Perhaps I could open it."

Her eyes measured his shoulders. "Maybe you could. Would you mind?"

They hurried toward the place where the elevated curves. She led him into "Sunset Villa" and up the stairs. "That's the door."

He gave the handle a wrench and at the same time threw his weight against the panels. Something ripped and the door flew open.

"Heavens!" she said. Fester sat in the middle of the floor with a pair of shears and several sheets of

fly-paper from which he was making a uniform for Marshall. In chasing Marshall to stick on a new garment he had succeeded in papering most of the room and much of his person. Marshall had not escaped unsheathed and he alternately yeowled and shook his paws frantically. Painfully, they began to restore order. Downstairs a door banged and a voice made itself heard.

"Hit 'im again. Whoops! Help!"

"Open the door! Get him in the eye!"

"Hang on to his billy! Whoops!"

"Mind the shelaly!"

Thud!

"Did he hurt yuh, darlin'? Take that, ye low-life good-for-nothin'!"

"Help!"

"Open the door!"

"I can't! Me hat's in me eye!"

"Look out!"

"Here, ye blue sardine! One in the eye!"

"Mind the billy!"

"I'm catchin' it on me muff! Whoops!"

"Look out, he's gettin' away!"

Crash!

"Good enough for yuh, yuh blinkin' wild-cat!"

"He's makin' for the door!"

"Run us in, will ye, ye brass-buttoned masher!"

"Policeman, ye call yourself, ye sheik!"

"Officer o' the law! Whoops! Comin' at yuh!"

"We been bouncin' a copper! Whoops!"

"Throw the goldfish, Pansy!"

Crash! Tinkle!

The door slammed.

Footsteps on the stairs.

The nurse, who had gone to the head of the stairs and retreated, turned to Allan.

"Well, they're here."

"I thought so."

"Mmmmm."

"Who are they?"

"Wait."

Mrs. Flusser and Pansy, somewhat disheveled, burst into the room. Almost, they bowed. "We been bouncin' a copper! Whoops! Did he hit yuh?"

"Not enough to get even. Gor! Abagail, we got company."

Mrs. Flusser straightened her hat. "Pleased to meet cha. Didja see the fight?"

Janet became confused. She did not know his name. Allan perceived the situation. "I'm glad to meet you. My name's Allan. Allan Allen."

"I heard yuh. This is me sister, Pansy Smiff."

Pansy nodded from the broken rocker where she sat panting.

"You see," Allan continued, "I was drafted to come to the rescue of Fester—by the way, where is he?"

"I wish," Janet whispered, "I had thrown him out the window. But I think he's on the roof."

"Fester? Has he been cuttin' up? The little smack!"

Allan grinned. "Yes, he's been cutting up—fly-paper, wasn't it, Miss——"

It was, as the good old books put it, Allan's turn to be confused. Janet couldn't think of her last name.

"Janet," she said.

"—wasn't it, Janet?"

"Anyhow," Mrs. Flusser said, "he's flew the coop. Pansy, me darlin', is yuh convanesced? The nerve o' him. 'Nice day!' I said, thinkin' he'd stay on his motor-circle. Does he stay? No. Off he comes. 'Goin' anywhere?' he asks. 'Halifax,' says Pansy, the sly croquette. 'Better get a move on,' he says. 'Move, me eye,' I comes back, 'we ain't no patent medicine.' So we starts walkin' an' he starts walkin' after us. 'Whoops, dearie,' I says to Pansy, 'now we're in for it!' So we starts runnin' an' he starts runnin' an' sweatin' an' swearin'. So in he comes an' I raises me muff as had a rock in it to pertect me chastity an' clips him as he comes through the door. 'Whoops!' I says——"

Allan and Janet went out and down stairs to the vestibule. On the bottom step they paused and sat. For a considerable time they confined themselves to

faint shuddering chuckles. Then she looked at him and he at her. "Whoops!" he murmured faintly. Doors opened and people stared at them. "It's hysterics," they said.

In the morning Pansy had a black eye. They performed the rite of peering at the stockings from the window and going into ecstasies over the strange gentleman's good taste and undoubted wealth.

"Lavender!"

"New ones!"

"Mr. Gorky's favorite color!"

"Second to green for me. Remember the first ones?"

"Do I? Would I ferget me own bust measure?"

Mrs. Flusser left the window and returned in violent haste when Pansy screeched.

"Glory be! Will ye look at that!"

There was no doubt of it. They could see his foot on the window-sill and a hand holding a shoe brush passing rapidly back and forth across it.

"It's a red-letter day for us, darlin'."

"I'm wonderin'—whoops!" Pansy held up the clock. It was only half past eight. "It's the early bird as gets the worm," she shouted. "We're risin' at dawn from to-day on, me darlin' little chickadee! Seein' his hands an' feet. Gor! It's like seein' the halo o' Saint Peter!"

Suddenly it was afternoon. Algonquin Navajo Porter was talking with Gertrude. They were in the lobby of the Ritz Towers.

"Tell me, O adequate beast," he asked, "what is the cube root of twenty-eight?"

"Something less than four and more than three. I hate decimals," she replied.

"And the floor space in the Taj Mahal?"

"Infinite, dear my lord."

"What, pray, is the mean annual rainfall of Crete?"

"Applesauce!" Gertrude murmured, for that is the way in which the more learned elephants converse. Thereafter she recited a neat array of iambs and anapests in this fashion:

> "Oh, the Prince of Wales, I've taken note,
> Spilled soup all down his dinner coat;
> And the idiot indolent Indian dandy
> Twiddles his thumbs and votes for Ghandi;
> The languid lissome Lapland lasses
> Drink their vodka in demi-tasses
> And the old roués in southern France
> Wear gunny-sacks instead of pants.

I could go on," she mumbled with wist.

"Let's," Algonquin answered.

So off they went with a hop and a jump and a tra-

"Oh, the Prince of Wales, I've taken note,
Spilled soup all down his dinner coat——"

la-la. A louse fell out of one of the topmost stories of the Ritz Tower, dead of starvation.

Janet sat in the Lyric Orpheus Motion Picture theater. On the screen Mary Pickford was throwing stones at somebody's grandfather. She wondered what the director looked like. Then there was a comedy and Farina was trying to escape a squad of men with fixed bayonets who were charging her. She wondered what John Thomason looked like. Then, in rapid succession, came a burning oil well in Pennsylvania, a police dog with eleven puppies, Herbert Hoover, a leap in a parachute shown by a motor-driven camera, and Bernard Shaw at the grave of the well-known soldier. She chewed gum shyly.

By and by she rose and went to the rest room. A motion picture magnate spoke to her kindly.

"I hope you are enjoying the entertainment which we have provided for you at great expense and risk of life and limb."

"Indeed I am."

"It is my duty and privilege to ransack the far-flung corners of the globe for your pleasure."

"You have succeeded well."

"When I was a boy," the magnate continued, "anything that had to do with celluloid fascinated me. Rattles, buttons, soap dishes, collars, ivory. And I was entranced by photographs. I used to sit with our family album in my lap for hours. Hence the Mack Sennett Comedies. Charles Chaplin is merely an impersonator of my mother's half brother. But perhaps you knew?"

"Really, I hadn't the slightest idea."

"How time flies," he said sadly.

Janet went back to her seat for a glimpse of old Spain. She was just in time.

Allan Allen spun around on the piano stool that was the only piece of furniture in his meagre apartment on Bleeker Street save the piano, a stove, a Frigidaire, a folding bed and a bureau. He hummed.

"Dummm-da-da, dumm-da-da. Reminiscent of Gershwin, but I'll put it down."

For some time a hangnail engaged his attention. Then he resumed his humming:

"Ta-ta-DE-ta-ta. DE-ta-ta-DE-DE. My girl comes from the old coun—try but she loves new things best. Shades of Goethe."

He tipped over backwards and fell on the floor.

Mrs. Roderick Payntor wrote out a check for two hundred dollars and seventy-five cents. It was three o'clock. She went to the window, opened it, looked out, came back to her escritoire, addressed and stamped an envelope, rang for a maid and said, "There." It was half past four.

During the procession of the above incidents Mrs. Flusser and Pansy had gone to a meat market and purchased some liver for Marshall, partly to make him forget the fly paper, and partly to have words with the butcher. In the latter, at least, they were successful. Armed with a carving knife he made a sally at them that sent them down the street, trailing clouds of sawdust as they ran.

Thus they were in the highest possible spirits when they noticed a gentleman across the street.

He was wearing green socks—*the* green socks!

Pansy was inarticulate. She gurgled and pointed. Mrs. Flusser looked. For a moment she thought that she was going to faint—and it was a new sensation to her.

Finally Pansy exploded. "It's him! Whoops!" And she was off.

Mrs. Flusser barely caught her in time. "Ain't ye got no social sense? D'ye think this here's a Paul Jones? We got to be tactical! Lemme think!"

Meanwhile the gentleman in the green socks continued his promenade serenely. He was unquestionably a magnificent personage. Short but stout and surmounted by a grape-purple countenance that was completely rimmed in what was probably the most remarkable set of whiskers to survive the lamented death of Victoria. His suit was a rich chocolate brown and across his vest front hung a gold chain that might have been used for a cable. His Panama hat was of a weave and shape that must have branded its creator the Darius Greene of all hatters.

Pansy leapt at the tether of her ostrich boa, to which Mrs. Flusser clung desperately.

"Wait. I've got it, darlin': we'll ask him where Thompson Street is."

They rushed toward the gentleman. But as they drew near their courage ebbed. Mrs. Flusser opened her mouth to speak. No words came. Pansy nudged her frantically. Silence. They were opposite their hero. Pansy struggled. Her mind was blank. Almost, almost, too late—she spoke.

"Are yez a—a fairy prince?" Horror chilled her veins.

The gentleman threw away his cubeb and turned a corner.

The gentleman threw away his cubeb and turned a corner.

CHAPTER SIX

NIGHT WALKED into the city suavely and turned on the electric signs along Broadway to spite its face.

Phineas Jade, the janitor of "Sunset Villa," walked through the ghostly cellar and emptied a little waste basket into an ash can. He picked a piece of broken mirror from the debris and went closer to the lone beacon in the cloister of brick pillars to inspect his countenance. He sighed sadly, tugged at his rust-and-oyster-colored goatee, and climbed into the dumb-waiter. With a gentle pull he was on his way to the apartments above.

All was quiet in Mr. Vaney's room, but there was a light burning. He stopped and peered through a crack in the door. Janet was sitting there reading. She trailed her story into the back pages of the Saturday Evening Post with a faint rustling. One leg was doubled up under her. She took off her shoe and scratched her foot. Her finger encountered a small hole in her stocking. She continued to read while she explored its dimensions. She dampened her finger with her tongue and turned a page. Mr. Jade sat in the dumb-waiter, spellbound.

After a while a low whistle separated itself from

the rumble of traffic. Janet rose, tip-toed over to Mr. Vaney's bed, listened to his breathing, and went out. Phineas Jade ascended a story.

In the room above, Mrs. Sylvester was preparing to go to bed. She undid her corsets and heaved a great sigh. Then she sat down at her do-all and shed hairpins until a mass of her mouse-colored coiffure detached itself from its scant base and plunged quietly onto the green blotter before her. She gathered up the hairpins and combed the switch. After that she sat motionless before her mirror for a space and commenced to massage the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. Something entered her mind. She stood up and made a deep bow to her reflection, took the arm of an imaginary gentleman, walked with him twice around the room, and then kissed him very thoroughly, kicking out one foot and an immense ankle as she did so. After this she read a chapter in her Testament.

Mr. Jade hoisted himself toward the apartment of Mrs. Flusser and Pansy. He was having an interesting evening. He stopped at their floor in some trepidation. The dumb-waiter door was open. But there were no sounds from the room, so he ventured further. Evidently the occupants were out. He reached a level from which he could see most of the chamber. It was empty. A tantalizing smell reached his nostrils. Pie! There was a large peach pie on

Mr. Jade sat in the dumb-waiter, spellbound.

the table within reach. Phineas Jade bent forward to capture the unexpected prize.

"Whoops! Take that, ye peepin' Tom." Bang! The janitor was flattened to the floor. Mrs. Flusser had dropped the gas range on him. Pansy followed with the wash bowl. They left him lying on the floor and retreated down stairs, roaring with unholy mirth.

Shortly afterwards they knocked at a grilled door. Paroxysms of laughter still shook them. An Italian admitted them.

"Whoops! We're celebratin'! Bring us the best in the house, Angelo!"

Pansy was startled. "Nothin' stronger nor wine for me, darlin'."

"Wine! With him kickin' under the gas range. Me eye! Give 'er a Rapsie-Daisy."

They drank. They drank again. And again. They switched to rum punches. It was their first spree in months. Unaccustomed to the initial momentum of a Rapsie-Daisy they found themselves before long conversing in a way that, if it diminished in lucidity, gained in volume. Then Pansy disappeared. Mrs. Flusser talked to a gentlman three tables away for half an hour before she noticed the vacant chair. She was not alarmed until she ascertained that Pansy was not where she expected she would be. It was eleven-thirty. She raced home. Pansy had not returned.

Mrs. Flusser sat down on the stove and moaned faintly. Phineas Jade had been removed. There was a knock at her door. Janet entered.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Flusser?"

"Pansy's been ab—ab— Gor! One o' them white slavers has gone an' eloped with her!"

"Oh, no."

"I knew she couldn't resis' it!" Mrs. Flusser was becoming more sober. She found her accent.

"I don't think so, Mrs. Flusser. She'll probably come home soon."

"Mebbe. Whoops! I wish I was in her shoes! Me as has been married five times."

Janet looked at her curiously. "Five times?"

"Five 'usbands I've had an' now only the green socks of—of a fairy prince. Whoops! Drat the wench! Fairy Prince! Whoops!"

"Quiet, Mrs. Flusser. Tell me about your husbands."

"There ain't much——"

"Five husbands," Janet repeated. "How is it you never had any children?"

Mrs. Flusser looked up. "Me 'usbands died too soon. Whoops! Children!"

A sudden and dreadful and preposterous suspicion came into Janet's mind. She sat on the bed.

"Your experience with men must have been very broad, Mrs. Flusser."

"Five husbands I've had, an' nary a one has so much as——"

"Broad! That ain't the word. Annoyin', I calls it."

"Did you live with any of them long?"

Mrs. Flusser paused. Then she said, "Ye won't tell no one?"

"Of course not."

"Then I'll have it out. Five husbands I've had an' nary a one has so much as seen me petticoat."

Janet had guessed. Mrs. Flusser's chastity had never been tampered with. Virgin soil! For a minute Janet could not speak. When she could, she said "Really."

"Gawd's honest truth. Me first eloped with me. We was gettin' on a ferry boat as was pullin' out, with me groom's father chasin' us close behind. On I steps over a widenin' crack. Me poor groom steps in the crack an' that was the last I seen of him."

"Terrible."

"I was a handsome widder. I was always a handsome widder. Number two jus' marries me polite an' nice at the county clerk's. I was wearin' a bunch o' sweet peas. Out we comes an' he gets his foot caught in a trolley track, with the horses bearin' down on him. He pops out a pistol an' shoots off his head, an' him with his best hat on."

"How tragic!"

"The next day I goes to work in a pickle factory cuttin' up cucumbers. I meets a young gent as drives

the empty vats up from the warehouse, originatin' in the country, an' I has to kind o' lead him along as ye might say. Four years we went around together with him holdin' me hand, an' makin' proposals an' not all of 'em honorable, either, it does me heart good to say. But nothin' comes of it, so one day I ups an' runs away to the city an' he follows me. Well, we gets married. Whoops! You should o' seen us. Him with a Gladstone bag an' me with furbelows an' a new shimmy over me stays. Night comes an' we goes to a hotel as has a bellhop in uniform and a name book, an' upstairs we traipsed. Whoops! I lights the gas an' we has beer an' pretzels sent up. Then out I go to change me clothes an' the poor country lad blows out the gas. Whoops! When I makes me bridal entrance the room smelt fit to kill a lobster an' there lies me husband dead as a door nail."

"Poor Mrs. Flusser!"

"I guess I picked out weaklin's. Me next—Gorky—had money to burn an' did. I mind how he lit a cigar on a shinplaster an' ordered champagne when the time come. Out pops the cork an' he rolls over unconscience o' fright. When he comes to he's singin' an' carryin' on an' we sends him to an asylum an' out he goes like a light three weeks later."

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"That's me next to the last. Me fifth was me unluckiest. We leaves the parson an' he says, 'Abagail,

I got hiccups.' An' so he has. Two days an' two nights he hiccups an' me slappin' him on the back an' drenchin' him with water an' rollin' him in boiled potatoes. He gets worse an' worse an' the doctor says only one thing might save him so I blushin'ly consents. But as I undoes me hug-me-tight he rolls his eyes up at me an' after one good look he gives a little quiver an' stretches out stiff as a poker."

Janet fought for breath.

"Poor Mrs. Flusser!"

"Whoops! So I writes me a poem about it as goes,

> Five 'usbands 'as I wed
> Never 'as I one to bed
> I always lays me girlish head
> Beside a corpse as is stone dead.

Whoops! Y' wouldn't believe I 'ad it in me, now, wouldja?"

"I've got—" Janet gasped, "I've got to go."

All of which explains nothing of Pansy's strange disappearance.

She had decided at the inception of Mrs. Flusser's conversation with the strange gentleman that a pilgrimage was in order. She rose and fumbled with the bolts on the front door of the speakeasy until they opened. On the street she became a trifle uncer-

tain of her bearings. Someone bumped against her and she strayed off the curbstone. She gurgled faintly.

After a space of time which her brain failed to record, she found herself in a heated argument with a push-cart vendor.

"Them peanuts is blue," she said.

"Huh?"

"Them peanuts is blue an' I'll be dyin' from poison."

"Peanuts all right."

"An' the lemons is purple. Ain't ye got no socks?"

"Sick?"

"Socks, ye jabberin' foreigner."

"No. No—no. No have."

"Green."

"How mean—green?"

"Blue peanuts."

Something, she thought, must be wrong. Anyway, she had eaten blue peanuts and was going to die. Out doors. Whoops!"

"I calla da cop?"

"Mind your own noodles, y' worm."

She walked, in a manner of speaking, on. She passed the entrance of the Montwyck Hotel where the Don Juan of the emerald socks resided. "Hmmmm," she buzzed. Pansy went into the lobby and sat down. "Hmmm." Then she said. "Hmmm,"

quite distinctly and negotiated the Scylla of the elevator door.

"Three, me darlin'."

"What name?" the boy asked.

"Name did ye say?"

"Name of your party?"

"How d'ye know there's goin' to be a party? Whoops!"

"Watcha tryin' t' do, kid me?"

"None o' yer fancy work, sonny-me-lad. Three, I said and three it is."

Unintentionally, she lurched toward him. He let her out on the third floor with great haste. Doors—a maze of them. She traversed the length of the hall. The boy watched her from behind the closed grill of the shaft.

"Who d'ya want?"

"Gentleman in the rear, y' impert'nant little tyke."

"Last door left."

Pansy swayed before the portal. The elevator clanked and hummed. She knocked.

"Come in!" At the same time a lock was turned, and the fairy prince stood before her.

"Ah—" he said.

"Good evenin', your—" She nearly said "honor." "Your—er—sir."

"Good evening."

"Would y' mind—y' see, I'm dyin' o' thirst an' I thought——"

"But madam, might I say that you apparently have had sufficient—to—ah—quench your thirst."

"I'm meanin' water."

"Come in."

It seemed to Pansy that the apartment was very luxurious. But, try as she might, she could not focus on any object long enough to get a definite impression of its furnishings. He brought a drink in a tall glass. Pansy gulped it.

"Have ye recognized me?"

"I fear not."

"I'm the lady as mistook ye for a—for a movie actor—the other day."

He thrust his fingers into his beard.

"There was somethin' about yuh—I apologize."

"Think nothing of it, madam. Will you have some more water?"

"If y' don't mind."

He filled the glass again and she emptied it. There was an awkward pause. Pansy's somewhat glassy gaze was drawn to his ankles.

"You're wearin' the pink an' brown ones to-day, I sees."

"I beg your pardon?"

Pansy blushed and it made her face a most unusual color.

"You seem to be—ah—overheated. May I offer you another drink?"

Pansy considered. "Just an ounce."

He filled the glass and she began to drink slowly, to gain time. Her heart thumped like a bass drum.

"Nice water ye have here at the Montwyck."

"What? Yes. Yes indeed."

"Excruciatin'ly nice."

"Yes—yes. Have some more?"

"Thanks. Ye seem to be well supplied."

"Yes. A tap."

"Really? Y' must live elegant!"

"Pooh! The bachelor quarters of an old war-horse."

"War-horse? Y' must o' been a general!"

"Not the army, my dear lady. The fire department."

"Land o' Goshen! One o' the preservers o' life! I'll bet yuh have medals to burn?"

He waved his hand. "A few. A few. Just now they are on—ah—at an exhibition. Or I'd show them to you. Have some more water?"

"Thank ye, no. But its mighty hospital of yuh."

Pansy peered at the socks again and the ex-fireman crossed his feet. A little panic seized her. She felt it was time to go.

"I'll change me mind, if it's all the same t' you." She held out the tumbler.

"Certainly. You must have been extremely thirsty."

"I was, to be tellin' the truth. I'm a great water drinker. Helps the kidneys, I says."

"It does. Unquestionably. It does."

"Don't it?"

"Bye the bye, we haven't introduced ourselves, have we?"

"Not as y' might call formal. Me name's Smiff. Pansy Smiff."

"Mine is Benjamin Burton Boles."

"It's a treat to know yuh."

"May I say the same of you?"

"Thank y' kindly."

"Do you live near by?"

Pansy went to the window and pointed across the roofs. "Near by? Whoops! We live on the edge o' your closet."

"So you do. We might signal each other, eh? Incidentally, who is 'we?' "

"Signal? We'll get up a trolley an' pass notes! Whoops! We'll be havin' the secret service on our trail. Romance, I calls it. Y' must come an' call on us immediate."

"But 'us?' "

"We live over at the home—me and me sister—as is married. Abagail Flusser."

Benjamin Burton Boles started violently. "You didn't say Flusser, did you? Abagail Flusser?"

"Bye the bye, we haven't introduced ourselves, have we?"

Pansy was surprised and a little crestfallen. "The same."

"Great shivering whale eggs!"

"Mr. Boles! Yer gettin' profane."

"Pardon me. It was something of a shock."

"Meanin' what?"

"I—I can't tell you at once. I'll call on you in a day or two."

"That's a promise?"

"Honor bound."

Suddenly Pansy decided that she had to go. She went.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALGONQUIN NAVAJO PORTER whitewashed Gertrude and disguised himself as a Maharajah. Then he traveled slowly up Park Avenue.

"We've been hired," he said somewhat morosely to Gertrude. It was one of his moody days and the sage old elephant respected the circumstance.

"I know it."

"They will make you do tricks."

"I like to do tricks. I shall probably do some that they'll not discover until we have left."

"I hope so. Anyway, it isn't raining."

"No. Otherwise I couldn't be a white elephant."

"Nonsense. Otherwise I'd paint you."

"You wouldn't really, would you?"

"Well—perhaps not. Here we are."

They stopped in front of a pretentious building. A doorman in the costume of Farragut eyed them curiously.

"The name is Payntor," Mr. Porter said with as polite a gesture as you'll see from any of the ushers at the Publix Theatres.

"Ah. Four."

They were guided down a carpeted hall. Ger-

trude rang a mother-of-pearl door bell with her trunk. A maid let them in and took their hats.

"They aren't quite ready for you," she whispered.

"Always ahead of our time," Mr. Porter muttered. "Well, that's life." From beyond heavy portiéres they could hear the cacophony of feminine voices and the clatter of cups and saucers.

"It's the cacophony of feminine voices and the clatter of cups and saucers," Navajo supplemented.

"And the ringing of the ladle against the bottom of the punch bowl," Gertrude contributed.

"Fine feathers," Algonquin gritted.

Gertrude smiled. "You're moody to-day."

"Who wouldn't be?" he ground out. "The hirelings of the rich!"

"It's dogma."

"Cant."

"Cult."

"Credo."

"What are the first words of the 'Internacional?' "

"Je ne sais pas."

Gertrude began to hum "Je-ne-sais-pas," very movingly.

"Try 'Ich weiss nicht,' " Mr. Porter suggested.

They strained their ears.

Suddenly Mrs. Payntor's voice rose above the rest. "Sunset Villa?" she inquired rhetorically, "I've decided to sell it."

"What about the inmates," a voice asked. It was Mrs. Wibble.

"The Lord will provide," came the answer. "I can't manage any longer."

"Poor things."

Gertrude nudged Algonquin. It knocked him down.

"Oh, I forgot," Mrs. Payntor said. "The entertainers."

They went into the magnificent drawing room. The band behind the palms struck up "Dixie." Gertrude began her Black Bottom. . . .

They were on their way down town.

"There's Fester," Gertrude said. "I wish there were a tub of water handy."

Fester came up the Avenue throwing marbles through the windows of apartments.

"Hello," he said.

Gertrude pretended not to hear.

"Gimme a ride!"

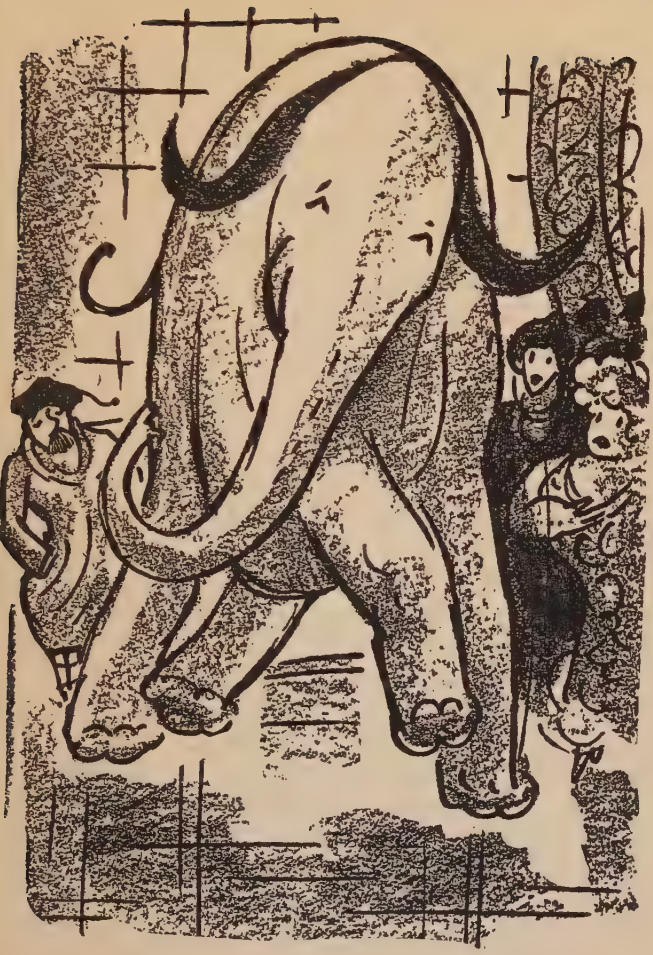
Mr. Porter stopped. "Where are you going?"

"Sunday School."

"But it isn't Sunday."

"I was goin' anyway. I was goin' to fix up the lavatory for Sunday."

Gertrude hoisted him up and set him carefully on her spiked collar. A can of glue in his hip pocket burst open and trickled down his and her sides.



Gertrude began her Black Bottom. . . .

At "Sunset Villa" he tried to dismount. He couldn't.

"Slip out of your pants," Mr. Porter called up.

He stuck to his pants.

Gertrude cried. Fester wailed. She desisted. "He'll have to stay there, I guess."

"I wanna get down."

"Don't forget to feed him." Gertrude shrugged her shoulders and knocked out one of Fester's nine-year-old molars.

Algonquin made his way into the home. Outside it was growing dark. Mrs. Flusser was sitting in the rocker with a cold towel around her head. Pansy was still unconscious. Janet came in from time to time. A little heap of Bromo-Seltzer bottles lay at Mrs. Flusser's feet. Someone knocked at the door.

"Come in. Come in carefully, too, mind ye. I got the heebie-jeebies."

The door swung in.

"Who is it? I can't turn me head."

"It is I, A. N. Porter."

"Oh. Take a chair."

"I have what I fear will be painful news for you, Mrs. Flusser."

She did not ruffle a vertebra. Such a move was accompanied by stabbing pains and a dizziness. "Spit it out. Gor! No news can be painful t' me now."

"I have been performing at the house of Mrs. Payntor with my colleague Gertrude."

"Your what? Shame on ye!"

"My elephant."

"Which elephant—Gertrude or Mrs. Payntor? Whoops!"

"The pachyderm."

"Flyin' high, eh? You'll be landin' hard—an' with a elephant, too!"

"I am not an eavesdropper by nature——"

Mrs. Flusser turned her head at the words and moaned. "What'd she say, the big turkey?"

"She said that she is going to sell 'Sunset Villa.' "

"What!"

"Yes. They're going to put in a cafeteria down stairs and a jewelry factory on the upper stories."

"Whoops! Mebbe they'll be makin' rooby floor-delees right where I'm sittin'!"

"But, Mrs. Flusser, don't you see——"

"Pansy, wake up y' miserable little cupswingin' angel!"

Pansy grunted.

"Here's Mr. Porter as has news for us."

"The point is, Mrs. Flusser, what are you going to do?"

A new agony shot through Mrs. Flusser's head. That had not occurred to her at once. She was stunned.

"Pansy! They're on the point o' disperplexin' us!"

"What? Lordy, darlin', I didn't know where I was!"

"Ye don't know where you're goin' neither, me lass."

Pansy bobbed at Mr. Porter and reached out for the burlap screen. In a suspiciously short time she appeared fully clothed.

"What's eatin' you, sweetheart?"

"There's a ruction stirrin'. That old she-ostrich has went an' sold the home."

"Gor!"

"What'll we do?"

"Mebbe we'll have to move."

"Move! Whoops! Ye wouldn't be undressin' in the presence of a lot o' joolers, would ye?"

"Let's go up an' give the old Tartar a piece of our minds."

Mr. Porter shook his head. "It wouldn't do any good. The sale has been arranged and besides, she has a particular dislike for you two. Although I am sure it is unfounded."

"Unfounded, ye call it? Not if we could o' helped it. It's founded all right, all right. We founded it every time she come snoopin' around."

In spite of their physical distress, their resentment against Mrs. Payntor and their violent reaction to the news that "Sunset Villa" was going to be hammered away by an auctioneer, a deep worry took hold of the hearts of Mrs. Flusser and Pansy.

When Mr. Porter had departed with Gertrude, surmounted by the adhesive Fester, they sat quietly.

"Lordy, me angel, we're plumb up against it."

"It'll be the death o' me."

"Mebbe we better go an' give ourselves up at the morgue."

"Mebbe we better blow out the lights an' run up her gas bill just to spite her to the very last."

"Or set it afire an' get run over by one o' the biggest o' them trucks."

"Pansy, me heart's a-breakin'."

"Mine, too, Abagail."

"So's me head. Whoops!"

"Gor!"

Mrs. Flusser remained impassive.

"Gor!"

"Pansy, me heart's a-breakin'."
"So's me head. Whoops!"

"It's a bloomin' shame."

"GOR!"

"What?"

"I clean forgot."

"Wha'ja forget?"

"Him!"

"Him, Pansy?"

"*GOR!!!* Las' night I was in his room talkin' to him like an old friend, a-lookin' out his window an' a-drinkin' his water. A-drinkin' an' a-drinkin'. Did ye hear me come in?"

"No, ye lunatic. An' I don't hear ye now. Kick it over my way."

"The gent with the green socks. I visited him!"

"Ooop!"

"And he's comin' over to see us to-morrow."

Mrs. Flusser felt her heart grow faint. "Pansy. Ye mean ye went into a gentleman's room and compromised yourself?"

"Darlin', compromise ain't the word!"

"Ye huzzy!"

In the sudden remembrance of Mr. Benjamin Burton Boles Pansy forgot her misery. Mrs. Flusser was green with envy and, while she deprecated the audacity of the adventure, she would have given her mother-of-pearl paper-knife and her lacquer box to have been the adventuress.

"Ye clandestine little minx," she repeated.

Pansy enlarged on the handsomeness, the pros-

perity and the hospitality of her host. They reached a state approaching hysteria.

In the midst of their excitement there was a light tattoo on the door and Janet stood before them. She had been weeping.

"What's the matter, ye poor lamb?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"They're selling the house. Oh, dear!"

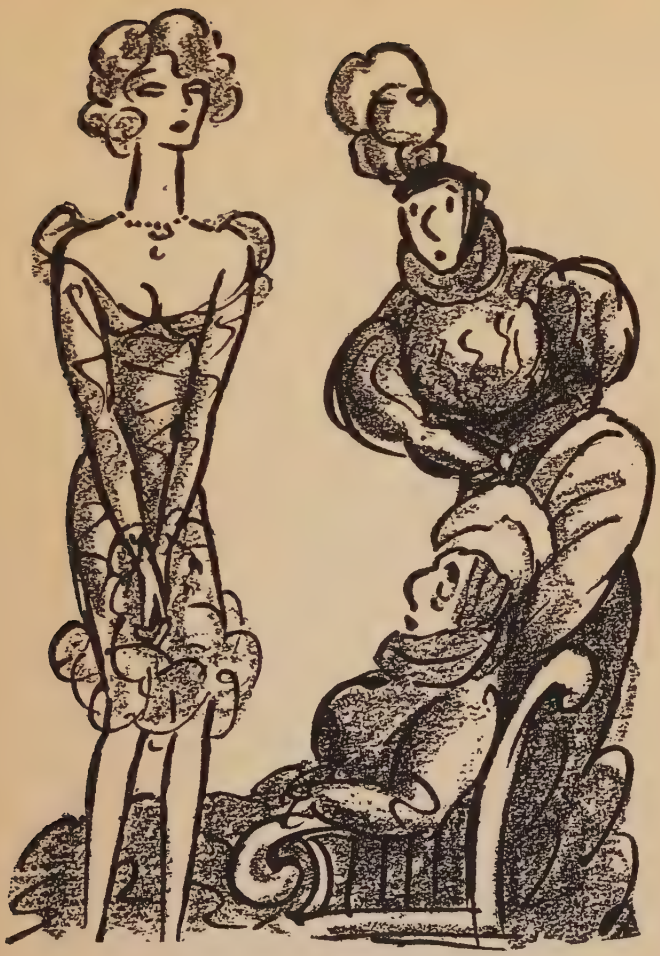
Gloom settled over them once more.

"You remember the young man who came in to help me get the flypaper off Fester," sighed Janet. "He hasn't much money, you know. But if I could have kept Mr. Vaney another month, we were going to get married. He hasn't asked me, but I thought if we had enough for the first few weeks— And now I've been discharged. Oh, dear!" She began to weep again.

"Poor darlin'."

"Gor!"

The room swam in dolor.



"—we were going to get married."
"Poor darlin'."

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOW, WITH something of a giddy swoop, the narrative returns to B. B. Boles, Esquire, and finds him in the act of washing out a pair of socks. At this point the story will have to be somewhat informal as the ex-fire-fighter stood at the bowl in his shirt-sleeves and rubbed gingerly, by which is meant what should be meant—with ginger. On the top of his bureau were his cuffs. His ornate suspenders appeared transiently from beneath an unbuttoned waist-coat.

As he washed he whistled. But twice he interrupted his melody. Once to say, "Damme!" and once to murmur, "Abagail Flusser!" Finally he rinsed the socks, went to the window and hung them over the ledge in the presence of two interested spectators, to whom he waved.

Thereafter he slipped his hands through the immaculate cylinders on the bureau, selected a stick from an umbrella rack filled with them, locked his door carefully, tried it, and rang for the elevator. In spite of the seeming sameness of the routine, a change had come into his life. For example, he waved away his customary frugal and hasty breakfast and set out to order a repast of surprising pro-

portions. Otto, the waiter, who had speedily become accustomed to the matutinal repertory from which he selected the meal was astonished to such a degree that he inquired after Mr. Boles' health.

"Excellent, thank you," Mr. Boles answered, as he attacked a large canteloupe.

Probably, Otto thought, he is in love. At his age, too. And he ruffled the thin corona of hair which he had so meticulously plastered to his head at dawn. Even a waiter can possess a modicum of temperament.

For that matter, Otto was correct. Mr. Boles had been in love for a long time. But it was not a sudden acquiescence of his inamorata which made his countenance so gay and his breakfast so adequate. There were other things. Things which turned his regular procedure of a subway ride to a rather dingy office completely about and brought him by the same vehicle to one of the white marble fronts well up on Fifth Avenue. He swung his cane gaily as he entered the elevator. He lit a cigar as he made a beaming exit on the fifteenth floor. He winked at the office boy. Whereby it may be seen that he was considerably excited.

"Mr. Schniedheit," he said.

"He isn't in," the boy replied.

"Tell him B. B. Boles wants to see him."

Mr. Schniedheit rose questioningly. "I'm very busy to-day, Boles. Couldn't you make it to-morrow?"

"I've located Abagail Flusser!"

Mr. Boles merely flicked the ash of his cigar on the carpet. Whereby it may be seen that excitement is no word for his condition.

"I've located Abagail Flusser."

Mr. Schniedheit's glasses dropped the length of their ribbon. "You what?"

"I've found Mrs. Flusser."

"Sit down, sir."

Some time later Mr. Boles emerged from the mahogany and silver office smiling. He descended in the elevator and hailed a taxicab. He had ridden in a taxi only once before—when a brick had fallen on him from a new building and they sent him to the hospital. But his long experience as a passenger of fire engines gave him a certain fortitude.

The meter had registered seventy-five cents before he alighted and made his way up the steps of a brown-stone house. He rang a bell. Mrs. Hannibal Dean greeted him in negligée after she had assured herself that it was he.

"This is a surprise, Burton."

It was.

"Maggie—" he said. She knew the tone.

"Wait. I'll fix you a cup of coffee."

He composed himself while she lit a gas burner and set the pot on it. Then she returned and took a chair, exposing three inches of pallid ankle to his ravished gaze. "You have news, Burton?"

"Maggie—. Maggie, I have always been desirous of subjecting to your warm heart a certain—er—proposition. Only the slenderness of my purse has prevented me from doing so. You will pardon the banality of the statement? I am now about to be possessed of certain commissions, I find. Er——"

"Go ahead, Joe—I mean, Burton."

"These commissions are of an amount which makes me feel free to—er——"

"Proceed, Char—er—Burton." Mrs. Dean was flustered. Her eyes became rheumy in response to her attempt to make them romantic. She tucked a lock of stringy grey hair under her boudoir cap. Which was also her dust cap. Love of a certain kind had entered her life more than once. Nevertheless she was listening to her second proposal. Mr. Boles made headway after a struggle.

"I have always thought that to make a man's life utterly felicitous a—a woman was necessary."

"How true, Donald. I mean Burton."

"So I came here while the spell of the morning sun was still fresh, to ask if you would be—would be—would be——"

"Of course, Har—er—Burton."

"Darling!"

"My hero!"

He rose shakily and perspiringly and kissed her on the boudoir cap. Then he sat with his arm around her waist until the coffee boiled over.

How swiftly does life turn from comedy to tragedy, from happiness to despair!

Gertrude walked sullenly along the street. Past the Public Library, west on Forty-second Street, down Sixth Avenue beside Bryant Park, east again on Forty-first and so to her starting point from where she recommenced the circuit. For three days and nights Fester had been literally glued to her shoulders. Every tug to remove him brought screams of protest and pain from his lips. Mr. Porter had tried everything—props, levers, a jack, a razor blade and the fire department. To no avail. Fester clung and Gertrude lost weight.

"Fester," she said finally.

"Yes?"

"I can't stand this much longer."

"Me neither."

"I'm going to turn a somersault."

Fester screamed. All the swank people on Sixth Avenue taking a short cut to the Automat looked up and laughed. Mr. Porter had deserted the pair to get a clothes prop so that Fester could be fed without inconvenience to Gertrude.

"Don't do it, Gertrude. You might break my arm."

"Nonsense," said Gertrude, who had a more graphic idea of the result of her suggested manœuvre.

"Don't."

Compassion filled her heart. "All right. I have another idea."

"What?"

"Never mind." She crossed under the elevated and lumbered west.

"Whatcha gonna do?"

"Fester."

"Yes'm."

"You have treated me unkindly in the past."

"Yes'm."

"Let's forget it."

Fester's heart warmed. "Yes'm."

They went on in silence. The river, dotted with ferries, stretched before them. Fester remembered his former drenching at the hands, or rather the trunk of Gertrude. "You ain't going to duck me?"

"Only in a manner of speaking. How old are you, Fester?"

"Nine."

"Dear, dear. So young. I'm a hundred and eighty-six."

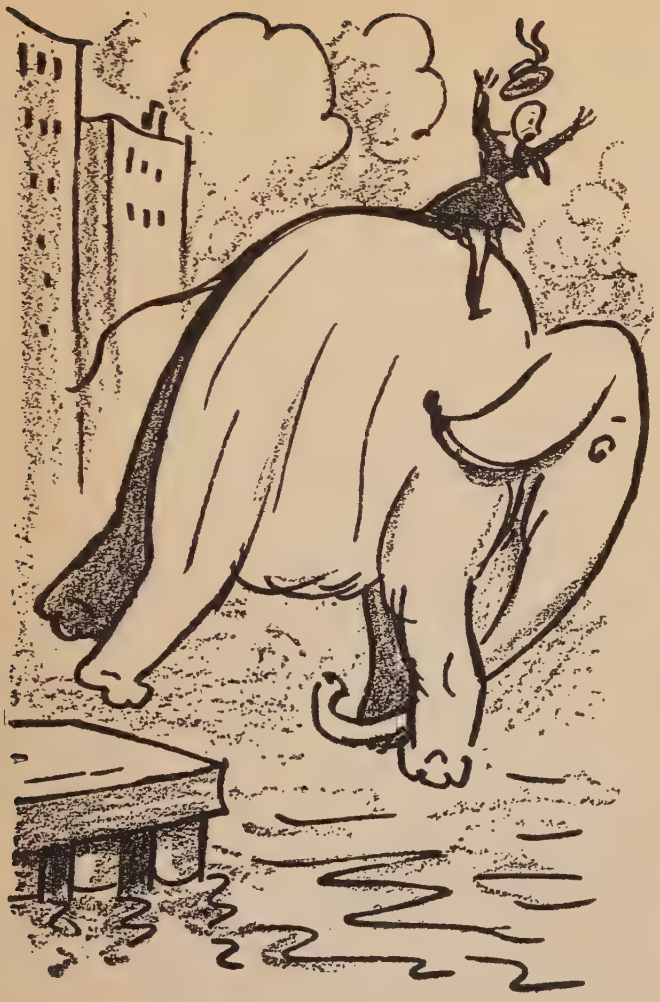
"Ain't you gettin' kinda near the water?" he interrupted anxiously.

"Shake hands," she said and bent her trunk back. Fester shook it.

"Wh-wh-wh-what's that for?"

"We're going to commit suicide together."

Fester looked glumly at the oily essence of the Hudson under their feet.



"MAMA!!"

"Don't—Gertrude."

"There is a time for all things—and everything in its time."

"I can't swim."

"And I shall refuse to swim. Goodbye."

"Mama!!"

There was a tremendous splash. A huge hole in the water closed. Gertrude and Fester were launched toward their Nirvana—or is that a woman's college? Then, something happened. As they struggled in the oleaginous fluid, the glue which bound them together began to soften. Presently with a soft submarine thuth they separated for the first time in three days. Fester came to the surface and was picked up by Les. J. Kaplan of 28465 Poplar Street, Brooklyn, captain of the tugboat Thor.

What of Gertrude? She tasted the dregs of the river with the stoicism of her race. The two centuries of her past flashed before her vision: how at the age of six she had stampeded and killed an explorer and two native beaters; how she was subsequently shown the light in a little Methodist mission in Dangjubb by the kindly prelate who captivated the ignorant savages with a demonstration of his zipper galoshes; her beautiful mother and the beautiful piano keys they made of her when she died; the kindly face of Mr. Barnum with all its Yankee shrewdness; little things—a night on the Ganges Brah-Maputrah with a youthful swain; the herds of grazing Yaks

that peopled her childhood; the death cell at Sing Sing.

It was almost over. Her pulses throbbed numbly. A bluefish bit her on the back. Idly she doubled her trunk and scratched the abrasion. Something was wrong. What? It burst upon her semi-consciousness. Fester had departed! Her feet smote the mucky bottom convulsively and she burgeoned upon the rippled surface. She was saved!

Dawn.

Eleven-thirty.

"Whoops, dearie, d'ye see what I see?"

Mrs. Flusser and Pansy rounded into Sheridan Square.

"Gor! It's 'im!"

"An' a lady friend."

"Get behind the newsstand. They're comin' this way."

Mr. Boles and Janet passed arm in arm.

"The huzzy! Stealin' him right under our noses an' pretendin' to be a friend."

"An' me thinkin' it was this here Allan Allen, too. We ain't licked yet, darlin'. Let's meet 'em around the block."

They circled the strolling pair at such a speed that the wind of their flying skirts upset ash cans and pedestrians. The fireman and the nurse were near the corner when they reached it.

"Good mornin' to yuh."

"Ah, good morning, Miss Smiff." Mr. Boles bowed.

"This is me lady-friend, Mrs. Flusser, of who I was tellin' yuh the other night."

"Indeed?" Mr. Boles took her hand warmly. "I'm delighted to make your acquaintance. Yes, yes. In fact, it is one of the happiest moments of my life. I am honored, greatly honored."

"Ye don't say?" Mrs. Flusser was somewhat taken aback by his effusiveness and Pansy was outraged.

"Yes, yes. Miss Weston and myself have been talking about you."

"It's mighty kind of yuh."

"Not at all. Won't you join us in our little perambulation?"

"If it ain't what I think it is, yes."

Pansy thought of Allen and spoke to Janet pointedly. "How's your young gentleman friend?"

"Allan?"

"The same."

"He's very well. But I don't think his songs are selling. I'm worried about him." She turned to Mr. Boles. "He's the young man of whom I was speaking. The one I want to marry."

"Oh, indeed? He's fortunate."

"Thank you. But I'm afraid we'll never get any farther than wanting."

"Well, well. Perhaps. Perhaps not. I think B. B. Boles sees a way out."

"What is it?"

"Bide your time, lassie."

Behind them Mrs. Flusser and Pansy were discoursing sotto voce. "Say, darlin' we've made an error. She ain't after him."

Pansy nodded. "But ye'd think from the way he give yuh the howdy-do he was goin' to lead yuh to the altar to-morrow."

"That's me sex appeal and me experience, sweetheart."

"Sex appeal? Whoops!"

"Seein' is believin'. Ye seen, didn't yuh? I had him tied to me apron strings from the word go."

"Mebbe y' did, sweetheart. Mebbe y' did. Anyhow, somethin's up."

At "Sunset Villa" they found a very dejected Fester waiting for them. Janet took him in her arms.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"I'm goin' to the bad boy's school?"

"What?"

"They've throwed me out of the orphalage."

Mrs. Flusser stormed. "The nincompoops! Threw ye out! What for?"

"Fer ridin' on Gertrude."

"Gor, they're losin' their senses!"

"I didn't do nothin' but ride on Gertrude."

"Sex appeal? Whoops!"

"Did y' miss school?"

"Yes."

"How long was yuh galavantin' around on Gertrude's back?"

Fester blubbered. "O-o-o-o-only since las' Tuesday. I was stuck."

"Tuesday? Gor!"

Janet interposed. "But didn't you go home at night?"

"I was stuck, I tell you. Mr. Porter gave me a pillow an' played his harmonica."

"Who is the young gentleman?" Mr. Boles asked.

"Never y' mind. We'll be dryin' him off. He's all wet."

Mr. Boles nodded with conviction. "Indeed he is."

CHAPTER NINE

A PARTICULARLY torrid and dry summer was fast drawing to a close. New York had baked itself like a banked oven for weeks. The mayor had perspired over municipal problems and night club tables in his shirt sleeves. Only Mrs. Flusser and Pansy preserved the decorum of their peculiar caste and transported muffs that made their fellows feel the heat a trifle more keenly. Fester had jumped in front of the hoses of gleeful white wings. Gertrude had sloshed herself continually in a convenient fountain.

And then one Monday morning there came a cold wind from Manitoba and other points of interest to the weather bureau. Accompanying the wind was a chilling rain. In itself it was an evil omen. And its portent was made good from the first tinkle of the alarm clock which ran face down in the chamber of the two ladies.

"Whoops!" Mrs. Flusser said. "He'll be hangin' his socks out. Wake up, y' little busy-bee!"

This time she had no difficulty in arousing her companion. Pansy peered through the window. "It's rainin'."

They took their places and watched the apartment over the roofs.

"He's five minutes late."

"Mebbe his clock was slow."

"Mebbe ours is fast."

Ten minutes. The rain made measurable progress.

"Mebbe he was out late last night."

"Mebbe—" Pansy was doleful—"mebbe he's hangin' 'em inside."

"On account o' the rain."

"Gor!"

"Soon it'll be snowin', too."

"We won't be here, then. Be ye forgettin' the foreclosure?"

"Gor."

"Always poisonin' your innocent pleasure. That's life, darlin'."

"Ain't it, though."

They waited half an hour in vain.

Breakfast was a dreary meal. The guests of the home felt their impending doom.

Fester joined the two when they had returned to their room.

"They're sendin' me to reform school this afternoon at three o'clock."

"Poor lamb."

"Let's adopt him, dearie. Wha' do we care for th' Mann Act—Whoops!"

"You're a bright one, Pansy. We won't even be keepin' Marshall after that plush-faced grandmother of a goat gets through with us."

"What'll we be doin'?"

"Huntin' apartments."

"D'ye think we can find one as we can live in?"

"Search me, me fine lady. Mebbe we'll be livin' in a tent."

"Shouldn't we be seein' the alderman?"

"Him? Whoops! With him ownin' three sweat shops an' tryin' to produce singin' an' dancin' shows? We'd be a fine mess o' collateral for that Shylock, darlin'."

"Wouldn't we?"

"Mebbe Mr. Porter'd take care o' Fester."

The young lad went toward the door. "Hell no, ma'am. I'd sooner be corrected."

Mrs. Flusser guffawed. "They'll never correct you, y' little divil. I'm wagerin' they'll turn ye out o' the bad boys' class."

"Then maybe we can have him," Pansy said.

"After that, dearie, we won't be darin' to."

There comes a day in the life of everyone when what the poets call their cup of woe is filled to the brim. On such a day it rains. Bones are broken and buses tip over. Poor relations die and rich ones return in perfect health from sanitaria. Cellars are flooded, subway trains stick between two stations, goldfish jump out of their bowls when the maid is

"Let's adopt him, dearie. Wha' do we care for th' Mann Act—Whoops!"

out, canaries catch cold, the stock market drops, and lovers quarrel. Nothing can be done about such a day. One must merely sit in as protected a spot as possible waiting for night and relief. Even so, the roof will usually cave in.

That was the sort of day which had fallen upon the house of Flusser and Smiff, its friends and acquaintances, heirs and assigns. The green socks did not appear. It poured. Mrs. Payntor was on the point of sweeping down in her unaccountable wrath. The elderly ladies had no city of refuge. Fester was to be sent to a reformatory, rubber-stamped "incurable." When the leaden hour of noon arrived the roster of misery seemed full. But those who have experienced a similar season of sorrow know that midday brings merely a hiatus, a breathing spell.

At Allan Allen's house three stalwart gentlemen arrived and removed the piano. On their heels came Janet. She was almost in tears.

Allan was sitting on the piano stool, but the men soon took that, too, so he offered her the chair and rolled up the carpet for himself.

"I guess," he said, "that I ought to return to my indigenous loess."

"To where?"

"My native heath."

"And the tin cans?"

"Let's not think about them."

"I have enough to keep us floating for a few

weeks, Allan. In that time you might become famous, even." Young ladies frequently speak of such things to young men—especially if they are handsome.

"I might become famous in that time, yes. And I might become a dish-washer. There are some nice positions open in that profession, I observed this morning. And some rather decent work in the way of furnace tending, cook's helper, and carpenter's apprentice. I was relieved to find that out. I had previously looked upon myself as a salesman—something between books and aluminum. Brushes, perhaps."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Well—what?" he said sulkily.

That was Janet's cue to sit down on the carpet beside him. "Well—kiss me." She imitated his tone of voice with great success.

"Damn it, I'm going up to see those publishers again this afternoon and make them eat my music. I can write it, I know."

"Of course you can. And promise you won't go home?"

"Kiss me while I make up my mind."

Interval.

"Nope. I won't go home. Not until the last dish in New York is washed, anyway."

Janet smiled at him. "That's better. I came over to ask you to help me about something."

"Kiss me while I make up my mind."

"What?"

"Mrs. Flusser and Mrs. Smiff. They're being thrown out of the home to-day. The others are pretty much taken care of. But they refuse to accept official charity and I thought we'd look around for an apartment for them."

"What rotten luck. Sure, we'll get them something with seven or eight rooms at the Plaza. Let's go. There's nothing to do here—you can't compose music on a broken rocking chair even if it does squeak."

While Allan and Janet were combing the neighborhood for an apartment for Mrs. Flusser and Pansy, Algonquin Navajo Porter was searching the streets. His steps were slow. His face was ashen. In the morning papers a small advertisement had appeared:

Lost: One elephant, well bred, last seen near Bryant Park, answers to the name of Gertrude, small boy glued to back of same. Reward.

For Gertrude had come up on the Jersey side of the Hudson. It's no wonder she was lost.

She had gone through Jersey City and waded across the marshes. Outside of Newark she read a placard: "Poets are a sign of decadence. No poet was ever born in Newark." So she went to Bayonne. There she met several people who had come to New York by automobile from Montclair and East

Orange and were trying to find their way back. They gave her a lift and eventually they reached Montclair, but nobody recognized it. A great yearning for the companionship of Mr. Porter was waxing in her bosom, the proportions of which allowed of a considerable and poignant waxation.

In Montclair, however, they took her to the top of the biggest hotel from where she could see the Woolworth building. So she bought a compass and began the weary pilgrimage toward the Mecca of Nebraska.

Meanwhile Mr. Porter called at the house of the unfortunate ladies, thinking that Gertrude might have strayed thither. When he entered the room, haggard and hopeless, another sorrow gripped the hearts of Pansy and Mrs. Flusser.

"Be y' sick, Mr. Porter."

"No," he answered weakly.

"Ye look near bein' a ghost from seein' one."

"No."

"What's chawin' ye?"

"Gertrude. Have you seen her?"

"She's dead." Mr. Porter noticed Fester for the first time.

He could not speak until they administered smelling salts. Then he patted the young man's head. "Tell me about it," he whispered gently, "you were with her to the last?"

"I'll say so. I killed her."

"Hold me lest I strangle the lad!"

"What!!!"

Fester's imagination began to function. "I got danged tired o' sittin' on her back an' I knewed thet water'd melt the glue——"

"Hold me lest I strangle the lad!" Mrs. Flusser sat on him.

"—so I jes' nachurally drove her down to the River and pushed her in an' I'm a good swimmer and I swum ashore an' she drownded."

"Oh, Lord forgive him, for he knows not what he hath done," Mr. Porter prayed.

"Saints derail him! Whoops! Ee—magine a tot like him drowndin' a elephant!"

"Wait'll he gets older, darlin'. He'll be a second Lionel Strongfort!"

Mr. Porter wept silently. When their amazement at Fester's feat left them they undertook to comfort him. Mrs. Flusser fixed him up on her bed with a wet towel and smelling salts. His shoulders quivered.

"Y' poor gentleman. Mebbe yuh can get another elephant."

"Never like Gertrude."

"Pshaw, she wasn't so reemarkable."

He sat up violently. "Wasn't she! Maybe you don't know that she could name all the Popes in their order, and make horoscopes, not to mention tatting and quoting the Scriptures from beginning to end."

"Well——"

"Name me an elephant that could do more. Oh, oh, oh."

"Fester, you ought t' be ashamed o' yourself. Y' should begin on mice an' rats, not elephants. You're learnin' to walk on your hands before y' can stand on your feet."

At that point Allan and Janet entered quietly. They had not discovered a suitable apartment and they were considerably depressed. Mrs. Flusser tried to rally them.

"Here's the bride an' groom to-be. Whoops! Are ye wearin' a ring, me love?"

The suggestion of a ring made the couple even more miserable and they merely shook their heads.

"Don't worry, darlin'. I can see Rolls-Royces in the young gent's eyes yet."

"C—can you see any supper?" Janet tried to laugh.

"Supper, darlin'? I can see a whole roast pig! Whoops!"

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Flusser? I'm afraid it'll be difficult to find a place to live in."

"I knows a hotel as'll give me an' Pansy a week's credit. That is, mebbe. Mebbe not. We're goin' there if we ain't stayin' here."

"And if they won't give you credit?"

"Darlin', you're askin' me riddles. There's benches in the parks, ain't there? Whoops! I been thinkin' o' gettin' arrested."

From downstairs came a commotion. Above the faint murmuring of the inmates of "Sunset Villa" rose the shrill voice of Mrs. Roderick Payntor. They heard her feet upon the stairs. Janet shuddered imperceptibly and Allan took her hand. Mrs. Flusser stood up. Her face became paler than usual. Pansy took her place behind. Mr. Porter paid no attention but continued to weep. Fester crawled under the bed.

"Hmmmm. Entertaining when you should be packing. Well, there's little enough to pack. I don't doubt but that your friends"—Mrs. Payntor surveyed the others in the room—"will assist you."

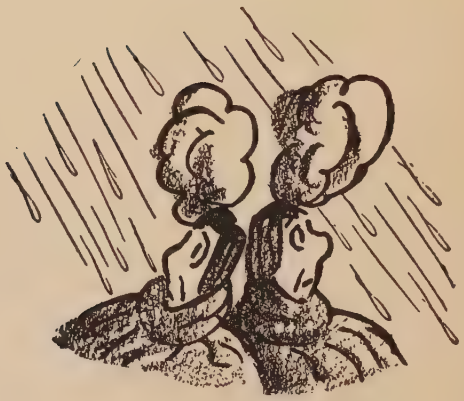
Mrs. Flusser eyed her coldly. "Perhaps you'd do it for us yourself. Ye can't bend over, bein' too fat, but ye might be some use foldin' me underclothes."

"Oh, Mrs. Flusser!" Janet caught her breath.

"That's all I'll be sayin' Janet, me lassie. She's a-throwin' us out as has no place to go, an' me as good as her any day in the week. But I ain't complainin'. What I says under me breath is none o' her affair. Come on, Pansy. Put Marshall in the hat box."

"Out we go. Whoops!" Pansy said.

"Poor, poor Gertrude."
"Oh, Allan, it's terrible."
Under the bed, Fester began to bawl.
The rain poured down.



CHAPTER TEN

PACKING UP to leave an old home is a sad affair. To leave when one has no new domicile in view, when the day is darkening and the rain is falling, is tragedy of Belasco-like proportions. The irrepressible "Whoops" was silenced. Even Marshall stepped soberly into the hat box and awaited his eviction like a French noble in a tumbril. Mrs. Payntor departed after bidding them icily to be out of the "Villa" in an hour.

Mrs. Flusser took a withered sheaf of heather out of a band box, looked at it, smelled it, and threw it into the waste basket without a word.

Pansy packed an old daguerreotype under a corset and then unpacked to peer again. Janet brushed their muffs. Allan pulled out the drawers of the dressing table and lined them up on the empty bed.

"Me hug-me-tight," Pansy said.

Mrs. Flusser muttered. "Me second 'usband's waistcoat."

"Me mother's Testament."

"Me wart cure."

"Me turkey's foot."

"Me almanac."

"Me silk ribbon."

"Me dance program."

"Me recipes."

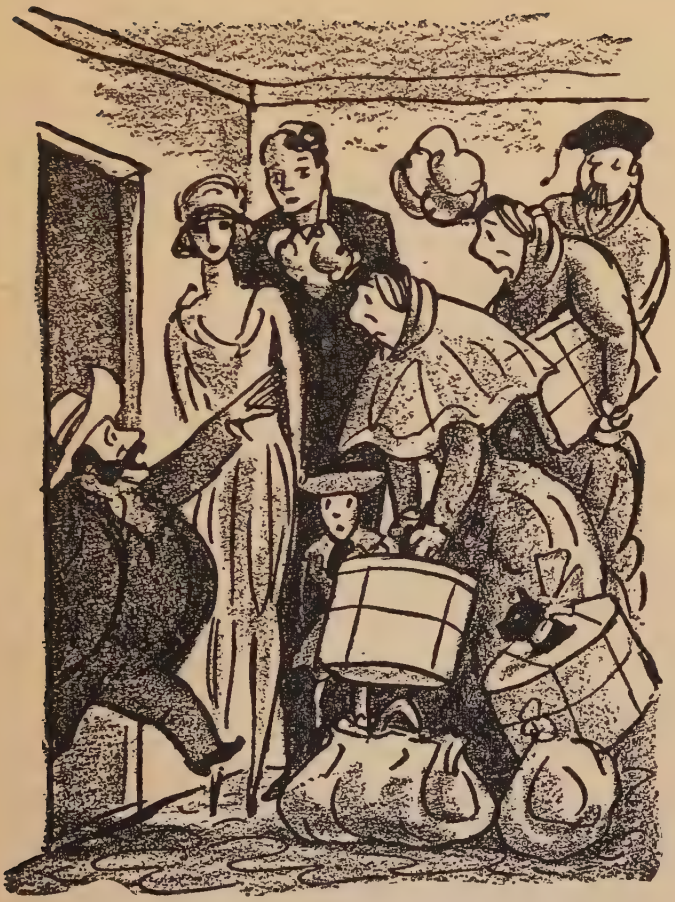
"Me Sunday stays."

"Me what-not."

The enumeration continued. Their guests were silent. Bye and bye the little room was bare with a nakedness that made its horrid wall-paper seem as grotesque as the history it had shrouded from the world outside. In the center of the floor was a heap of miscellaneous bundles—a carpet bag, a straw suit case, three packages wrapped in newspaper, a what-not stripped of its glittering ornaments and showing raw wood where the shellac had been chipped away.

"Well, I guess we better be goin'."

"Fester, come out from under the bed. You'll have to be gettin' back to the orphanage. It's near three."



"Comfort yourself, madam, I bear news."

"Will ye be kissin' me good-bye? Ye won't, ye rascal? There! That's a good boy. We'll be comin' up to the reform school to visit ye."

Janet was crying quietly. "I wish we had addresses to give each other. But you can find out where I am through the hospital."

"Come on, Mr. Porter, no use cryin' over spilled elephants."

They took a last look around. Then in solemn cavalcade they opened the door.

A breathless perspiring bulk had just reached the top of the stairs. Benjamin Burton Boles.

"I see you have anticipated me. You guessed?"

The procession halted. "Guessed what? We're beyond guessin'. They're puttin' us out."

His suit was clammy with rain, his voice was hoarse with effort and something else. "Then I am to be congratulated on my haste. I seem to be in the nick of time. Comfort yourself, madam. I bear news."

They remained impassive. No news, they felt, could be good news.

"Mrs. Flusser, did you ever hear of Randall Flusser, the brother of your husband—er—one of your husbands?"

"Him as ran off to South America an' become a British subject?"

"Precisely."

Janet began to realize what was going to happen.

"So that's why you were asking me all about Mrs. Flusser the other day?"

"Yes. I wanted to be sure it was the right Mrs. Flusser. You identified her. The—ah—shall we call it matrimonial sequence—made her unmistakable."

"Matrimonial sequence. Whoops! Is that a thing to be talkin' about in front o' ladies? Well, what about me brother-in-law?"

"Only this. Two years ago he died and named you as his sole heir."

"To what, if you don't mind me askin'?"

"Well," Mr. Boles stopped impressively, "when all fees and taxes are paid—I myself shall request a pittance for my efforts—you will come into possession of about five million pounds."

"Five million pounds? Whoops! Pounds o' what?"

"He means," Janet strangled, "about twenty million dollars."

Mrs. Flusser's mouth opened to its fullest extent. Then it wavered. It shut. She drew a breath. Then she emitted the loudest "Whoops!" of her career.

"Pansy!!!!! Did ye hear that? Rich, that's what we are. Millionaires. We'll be havin' cheese cake every night!"

Pansy sat weakly on the luggage. Janet began to giggle hysterically. Allan trembled.

"Whoops! Don't spare the horses, driver!"

Only Mrs. Flusser retained her composure to any extent.

"How'd y' find out about it?"

Mr. Boles smiled. "I was attached to the firm of his solicitors as—as—well—doorman, at one time. I heard the story and remembered the name. I'm more than happy to be of service to you."

A strange expression crept into Mrs. Flusser's face. "Can we be gettin' any of it to-night?"

"Half the estate has been liquidated and is ready for your immediate disposal. There is still ample time to get to the bank."

"Whoops! Shake a leg!"

They found themselves running madly down stairs in her wake. None of them remembered afterward just what they had done and where they had gone. There were elaborate offices. Men with eyeglasses and cold smiles who regarded them curiously and almost enviously. Elevators. Taxi-cabs. Frantic telephone conversations. And always, ringing in their ears, the mention of sums of money that left them gasping. Mrs. Flusser wanted something; they could not gather what it was. She set machinery in motion to buy "Sunset Villa" at once. She held three private conferences and signed several checks. One of the latter Mr. Boles tucked into his pocket. Then he disappeared. No one thought of Fester's impending doom. He made a very quiet and round-eyed member of the party.

It was obvious that Mrs. Flusser was going to make a screaming success as a lady of means. She brought them all down to Fifth Avenue and they hailed another cab. Janet, Allan, Mr. Porter and Fester were each more bewildered according to their intellects and emotions when they heard her give a Park Avenue address.

"I've got a surprise for yuh," she said, "Whoops! Don't spare the horses, driver!"

At six Mrs. Payntor returned to her luxurious apartment. Her rage had been exhausted on the poor whom she had exiled. She was exhausted from brow-beating her many servants. But she was pleased with herself.

The butler addressed her timidly. "A Mrs. Flusser and some friends are waiting for you, madam."

"What!" she leaped as though she had been hat-pinned from behind. "Throw them out. I said throw."

"Throw, madam? Mr. Dunlop has joined them and is also waiting."

"Who's he?"

"He owns the building, madam."

"Very well. Show him in. But as for the others, don't let them stay another moment."

"Very well, madam."

She swung her foot angrily. Mr. Dunlop entered, followed by Mrs. Flusser, who seemed to be in great glee, and four others who were stupefied.

"This is farcical!"

Mrs. Payntor's eyes flashed at the butler. "You're fired!" she squawked.

"I expected as much. I have taken the liberty of securing another position."

"My client," Mr. Dunlop waved toward Mrs. Flusser, "has placed me in a rather unfortunate position, Mrs. Payntor. I daresay if you had not been a month and a half behind in your payments of the rent she would not have presumed——"

"Your what?"

"My client, Mrs. Abagail Flusser——"

"What's this nonsense. Are you mad?"

Mrs. Flusser could contain herself no longer. "Whoops, dearie! Sittin' idle when you should be packin'. Well, there's plenty to pack. I don't doubt that your servants'll assist ye. Exceptin' mebbe the butler."

"This is farcical!"

"Ain't it, Mrs. Payntor. You see, I've gone an' bought the buildin' an' took a fancy to this apartment, so I'm askin' ye to be out in half an hour. Whoops! Ye better be packin'."

"My lease," Mrs. Payntor roared.

"It's unfortunate," Mr. Dunlop said. "But you've broken it."

Mrs. Flusser walked around the room impertinently. "I'll be keepin' some o' the decorations if you've a mind to sell."

"This is incredible!"

"Tell y' what I'll do. Y' gave us half an hour. Pansy an' me'll give ye till to-morrow. Me, I'd kind o' like to spend a night at the home knowin' it was me last an' knowin' I had a place to go."

Mrs. Payntor dropped inertly to the floor. It was a sincere performance.

The balance had been reckoned. They dined at Sherry's in a private room. When they returned to "Sunset Villa" Gertrude was waiting patiently for them. English is incapable of describing that evening of rejoicing—not even Mrs. Flusser's and Pansy's English. Ultimately they slept with broad and peaceful smiles. The world would have been perfect if Mr. Boles had remained, but he had fled to the slightly fleshy arms of Mrs. Dean and escorted her to a steepled edifice.

In the morning the horizontal alarm clock awoke them for the last time. Automatically they plunged to the window-sill. Beside the green socks hung a pair of pink silk stockings. For a long time they gazed. Mrs. Flusser blew her nose.

"Ain't that jus' like a man? Whoops!"

THE END